

ALFRED

# HITCHCOCK'S

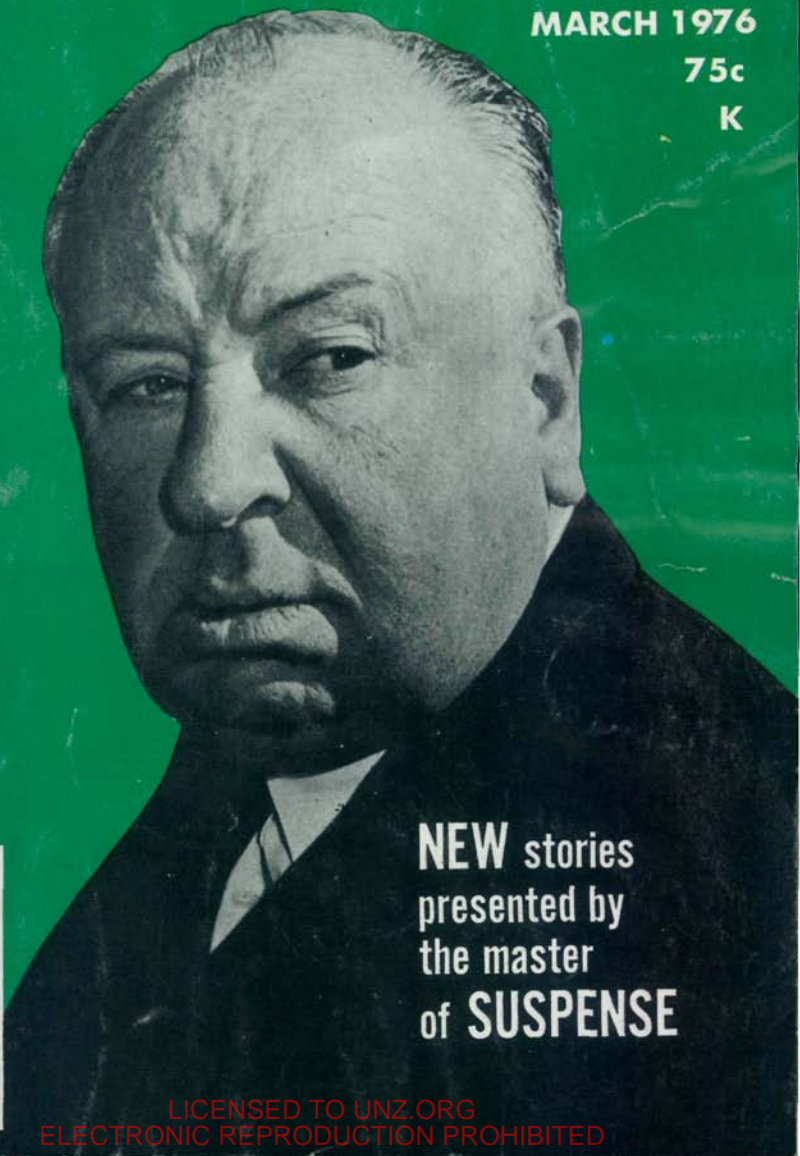
## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MARCH 1976

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March 1976



Dear Reader:

When March comes in like a lion, they say, it goes out like a lamb. And what about us? Do we exit from this world serenely and sedately if we entered it squalling and screaming? Usually not. Some of us, it appears, never have to exit at all, judging from the lead story, *Where Is Heinrich Herren?* by Al Nussbaum.

For the rest of us, however, coping with a departure from this vale of fears, whether our own or someone else's, can be rife with surprise, as witness in *Ladies' Man* by James McKimney and *Preliminary Investigation* by Albert Avellano.

Oh, well, there's always religion—or is there? Even nuns, it seems, aren't entirely free from the bad effects of a wicked world, as the heroine of Henry Slesar's novelette, *Hiding Out*, discovers.

So let's not worry about our entrances and exits. The time can be better spent curled up with a good mystery story.

Good reading.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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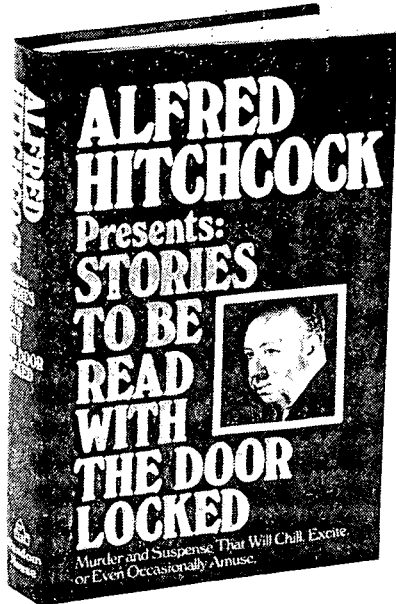
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*Vic agreed that it was weird how much alike the men looked....*

# Where is Heinrich Herren?

by Al Nussbaum



**A** white-bearded old man stepped into the center of the trail one league south of the walled city. The breeze pasted his flowing blue robe to his body, outlining for a moment a physique that might once have been formidable. He raised his right hand imperiously to halt a hurrying caravan. The traders feared he would cause them to arrive after the city gate had been closed for the night, but they stopped anyway. Far better to camp outside the city wall than to anger a high priest.

*He told the traders what he wanted in brief, clipped syllables. Quickly, they assembled seven young women before him. One stared at him boldly from obsidian eyes, and he rejected her with a flick of his hand. She was replaced with a girl who never lifted her gaze from the ground.*

*One by one he pulled the robes from the women and carefully examined their bodies. When he was satisfied that they met his exacting specifications, he paid for them with crude silver coins from the pouch at his waist. Then he had the traders stake the women out on the open sand, a separate stake and leather thong for each wrist and ankle.*

*That done, he dismissed the traders and they hurried away, leaving him alone with his purchases. He turned and walked slowly to where his horse was tethered, and seven pairs of apprehensive dark eyes followed him. He pulled his finely woven robe over his head, draped it across his mount's fur-covered saddle, and bent to untie his sandals.*

*Once he was completely naked, he returned to his captives, carrying a bronze dagger loosely in his right hand. He knelt beside the first girl and slit her torso from groin to gullet, being careful not to inflict an injury that would be immediately fatal. She screamed from far back in her throat and thrashed wildly, straining at the thongs that held her. Thick red blood gushed from the wound. He then hooked his fingers into the lips of the wound and pulled it open, and her blood washed across his thighs before seeping into the sand.*

*He ignored the cries and worked with single-minded intensity. Using knife and fingers, he probed deeply for the parts he wanted. The other women howled in terror and struggled vainly to free themselves. It was as though he were deaf. He paid no attention to their pleas. As soon as he was finished with one, he moved to the next and repeated his grisly performance.*

*Bronze does not take a fine edge, nor does it long retain the poor one it will accept. By the time he reached his last victim, he was forced to hack and tear because he could no longer slice—and his beard was crimson.*

The apartment building was on Connecticut Avenue, almost at the District of Columbia-Maryland line. It was a large white, six-story structure that took up the whole end of the block facing Connecticut. Vic Gerrard parked his old sedan in the black-topped lot behind it and

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glanced at his wristwatch. It was twenty after one. His appointment was for one-thirty, so it seemed he'd be on time for a change.

How many job interviews had he blown by arriving late and making a disastrous first impression? He couldn't begin to guess. His unconscious mind was probably trying to tell him he didn't really want a job. Well, he had news for his unconscious—his conscious mind, too, knew he didn't want one. He would much prefer to spend the summer hiatus between classes at the University of Maryland lounging on the shore of Virginia Beach. The trouble was, he couldn't afford to; his veteran's educational benefits had almost run out and, in any case, there were no checks when he wasn't taking classes.

If he wanted to continue to eat, he had decided, he either had to find a job, or rob a bank. But, just as he was too lazy for work, he was also too nervous to steal. Luckily, he had read the classifieds in *The Washington Post* that morning and discovered what might be the ideal compromise; someone had advertised for a research assistant. Perhaps there would be some way he could take his work to the beach. He had called, and a gruff, heavily accented voice had given him an appointment.

Vic Gerrard got out of his car and walked to the apartment building. He was wearing his only suit, a light-blue single-breasted model he'd bought in Hong Kong when he was in the Army. It was almost new, showing he hadn't worn it often in the seven years he had owned it. It was tight across his shoulders and the waistband of the trousers dug into him. He had been tempted to wear a floral sport shirt, but thought better of it.

Except for his hair, which was a bit too long and a bit too unkempt, he could have passed for a serious graduate student. He still might. He hoped so. That was half right, anyhow—he *was* a graduate student in psychology. He just didn't work any harder at that than he did at anything else. Ever since his Army tour in Vietnam, he had felt he was living on borrowed time. There's only one sane way to live on borrowed time—pleasantly, leisurely, without wasting effort on worry or anything else.

He entered the building through the rear entrance after ringing apartment 2-C and having the door buzzed open. He took a stairway up one flight instead of following the arrow marked *Elevator*. The apartment door was open when he reached it, and a matronly woman



in a white nurse's uniform stood waiting.

"Mr. Gerrard?" she said.

He nodded.

"This way, please." She led him to a room where a fat old man sat propped up in a hospital bed. There were tables on both sides of the bed and a bedtable was in front of the man. All three surfaces were covered with medicine bottles, correspondence, and miscellaneous litter, and the table on his right also held two telephones and a stack of 8×5 manila envelopes. There was an unpleasant odor Vic couldn't identify.

"I am Carl Miller. Sit down." The old man indicated a chair beside the bed. The nurse left them and closed the door behind her.

Vic Gerrard sat and studied the old man. He was fat and pink. His heavy jowls were clean-shaven, and his white hair, what little there was of it, had been cropped close, leaving him with a head as round and smooth as a honeydew melón. His unblinking eyes were a pale gray, like dirty bath water, and his lips were puckered and moist like a baby's. Vic was sure he wasn't going to like the man, but he was certain he'd like his money.

Carl Miller picked up a piece of paper from the table in front of him. His right hand had a star-shaped burn scar on the back of it. His fingers were like little sausages. "Mr. Victor Gerrard?" The voice was gruff, all business, and marked by a foreign accent of some kind.

"Yes, sir."

"You have done research before?" The accent seemed to be German—German with, perhaps, the influence of another language.

"Yes, sir. I'm a graduate student, working toward my master's degree in experimental psychology. I've had to locate and assemble material for several papers and reports—things like that. And I'm working on my thesis too."

The old man shook his head. "The work I have is not like that." He picked up one of the manila envelopes from the table beside him and sailed it through the air to Vic.

Vic was so surprised he almost missed catching it. He opened the flap and four photos slid out into his hand. The first showed two views, full face and profile, of an old stone bust. One of the ears was broken and so was the tip of its nose. The second was of a heavily cracked painting. It showed a man in a toga, standing in a marble palace. The

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third photo had also been taken of a painting, this one of a portrait of a man dressed entirely in black. The last was a view from above and behind, as two men in Nazi uniforms descended a long, broad flight of marble steps. The man to the left and to the rear was glancing back over his shoulder. Below them, an honor guard was lined up and waiting at attention. The photos had one thing in common—in each case the face was strong-jawed, serious, and the same.

"You will note, these men look enough alike to be fathers and sons," Miller said.

Vic thought that was an understatement. Twins would have been a better comparison.

"I want you to find someone who looks like this."

"Who?" Vic asked.

Miller shook his head angrily. "If I knew who, I would not need you!" He calmed quickly. "I want you to find someone, a . . . a look-alike for the man in the pictures."

"Why?"

"Because I will pay you. That is all you need to know."

"How should I go about it?"

"That is up to you. I will pay you one hundred and twenty dollars for one week. Then you come back to me and tell me what you did. And tell me also how you plan to spend the next week. If I like what you did and what you plan to do, I will hire you for another week. Because you are not experienced at this type of search, perhaps you will have a new thought."

"How long will this go on?" Vic asked.

"Until I don't like what you do, or . . . or a man is found."

Vic frowned. It seemed too easy. "That's all there is to it?"

The fat man pursed his thick wet lips. "One thing more. You are not alone. There are others searching, and—" he gestured to the stack of manila envelopes which presumably contained more photos "—there will be more. The first person to succeed will earn a one-thousand-dollar bonus."

Vic thought about the job as he drove back to his apartment. It looked as though he had found a very good deal indeed. If he could keep thinking up plausible stories to feed the fat man, he could look forward to a pleasant and carefree summer—provided, of course, no

one actually found a look-alike for the men in the pictures.

Linda Bryson was waiting for him inside his apartment. They sat on the couch sharing a can of beer and he told her about the job. Linda wore jeans and a loose shirt. She was twenty-one, looked seventeen, and sometimes acted as though she were seventy, and at other times seven. She was beautiful, intelligent and fun to be with, but he knew she must have a deep flaw somewhere. Otherwise she wouldn't be attracted to a no-ambition loser like him. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and she was sitting with her legs tucked under her.

"Let's see the pictures," she said.

He handed her the envelope and went to get another can of beer. When he returned, she had the four photos lined up on the coffee table and was leaning over them.

"Interesting?" he asked, plopping down beside her.

"Of course," she answered, not looking up.

"Why 'of course'?"

"I'm an art major, remember?"

"So?"

"So, the bust and paintings are art. The bust is pretty old. Dates back a couple of thousand years, at least. It's probably Greek or Roman. The paintings are much more recent. I recognize the full-length man in the robe from Raphael's 'The School of Athens.' It's in all the art books. The portrait is pretty well known too. It's 'The Man in Black' by Velasquez."

"Okay, brain. What about the photo of the guy on the steps? Who is he, and who took the picture?"

Linda grinned. "Darned if I know." She reached for the can of beer and took a sip. "I can tell you who the other man is, though—the one with his back to the camera."

"Who?"

"Adolf Hitler," she said.

Vic looked at the photo again to see if he'd missed something. There wasn't enough showing of the other man to identify him. "You're guessing," he accused.

"Yes," she admitted, "but I'll bet it's a good guess."

They sat looking at the photos, silently passing the can of beer back and forth. After awhile she said, "It sure is weird how much alike those men look."

WHERE IS HEINRICH HERREN?

"Yeah, weird," Vic agreed, and the next time she reached for the beer, he reached for her.

*The boy wore the bloodstained tunic and chest protector of a Roman legionnaire, but the blood was not his and the uniform was too large for him. He couldn't have been a day over fifteen and the uniform was for an older and bigger man. The insignia and decorations he wore were of high rank, far too high a rank for a boy.*

*He was big enough to be killed, however, even if he wasn't big enough to fight effectively. He knew he'd be given no quarter by the local barbarians who had decimated all ten cohorts of his legion and were hunting for survivors. Knowledge had made him cautious. He had spent the day hiding in the bed of a dry stream, venturing out only after dark.*

*He had no boy's fear, and the handle of the short sword he carried was familiar to his touch, even though it had never felt so heavy. He moved like a man, listened to the night sounds and catalogued them like a man, reviewed his options like a man. He knew he had to act soon or it would be too late. Fortunately, he had always thought ahead, preparing for the worst. He never burned bridges behind him. Earlier when he had passed this way, he had noted the goat herder's hut and kept his men from raping the man's young daughter. Now he was about to be rewarded for his foresight.*

*The boy crept up to the hut and waited to one side of the entrance. He stooped and picked up a handful of pebbles and threw them a few at a time into the goat pen. The animals began to bleat and move about restlessly.*

*The herder, well attuned to the moods of his flock, emerged almost immediately and stopped, sensing the boy's presence. He turned slowly and froze, a look of horror passing over his dull features.*

*The boy held the short sword high over his head with both hands and brought it down with all the force he could command. It split the man's skull to a depth of six inches and he crumpled to the ground, leaking blood among the goat droppings. The boy returned the bloody sword to its sheath without bothering to wipe off the gore.*

*Then he drew his dagger and entered the hut.*

Victor Gerrard spent a relaxed week. He read, visited friends, saw a

few films. Then he returned to Carl Miller's apartment. The nurse ushered him into the old man's room and left them alone as before.

"What have you been doing all week?" Miller wanted to know.

"I've been going through back issues of picture magazines at the library," Vic lied easily. "Mostly news magazines. No luck though."

"And next week? What will you do?"

"I'll go down to the Library of Congress and start searching newspapers. They have all the major papers on microfilm. I'll start with the largest papers and go back a couple of years, page by page, checking all the pictures."

The fat old man nodded. "A good plan. But look in New York City newspapers only. Other men will attend to the other cities." He picked up a check from one of the tables with which he surrounded himself and handed it to Vic. It had already been made out in the promised amount and signed.

Vic smiled. It was the easiest money he had ever stolen; but when he returned the following week, he was confronted by a locked door at the street level, and no amount of bell-pushing brought a response from Miller's apartment. Then Vic noticed a card taped above the bell for Miller's apartment. It carried a typed message, notifying all research assistants that Carl Miller was at D.C. General Hospital and would have to be contacted there.

Vic gave a fatalistic shrug. He should have known it was too good to last.

He stopped at a service station to telephone the hospital to inquire about Miller and ask about visiting hours. He was told that Miller was in a private room in a wing where visiting restrictions did not apply. Vic could come any time.

That didn't sound as though the old man was very sick; however, when Vic entered the hospital room the man certainly looked it. He wasn't sitting up as he usually was, and there was a bluish tint to his lips. Oxygen cylinders and a clear plastic canopy stood in a corner of the room, ready for instant use. This time his private nurse announced "I'll be right outside the door" before leaving them alone.

"Did you. . . find him?" Miller asked. It was plain that it was painful for him to speak.

"No, sir."

"Your check. It beside me is. Take."

Vic picked up the check waiting for him on the nightstand.

"I am not well," the fat man said. "My heart. I may not have much time left. Find him for me and I give you ten thousand dollars."

Something in Miller's tone and choice of words made Vic ask, "You mean you're sure there is such a man? For sure?"

"Yes, yes, there is such a man. He is somewhere in this country. I am sure of it. He can be found, but I do not have the years to wait. I must find him now. He is between thirty-seven and forty-four. Even now his wealth and power grow." He stopped to catch his breath and to moisten his lips with a gray tongue. "Remember, find him and I give you ten thousand dollars."

Ten thousand dollars wasn't something Vic had to be told about twice. Driving home, that, and the long months of leisure it would buy, were all Vic thought about. However, once inside his apartment he began to think about the other things the old man had said. The look-alike *did* exist. It might still be a needle-in-the-haystack search, but at least he knew the needle was there; it actually existed. Also, he had an age range, 37 to 44, for the man; and Miller had said the look-alike was building wealth and power.

This was all data Miller had been withholding for some reason, but which changed everything. Vic wondered how many, if any, of the man's other researchers had been given that information; hopefully, none of them. Vic wanted to think he had an advantage over his competition for the ten thousand dollars.

When Vic hadn't been certain there was a look-alike, or known anything at all about the man, a random search through newspapers and magazines would have been as good a way to find a look-alike as any other. The more pictures examined, the greater the chance of finding someone who resembled the men in Miller's photographs. Miller had changed all that, and Vic tried to think of a better way. He knew there had to be one.

What did Vic know about the rich and the powerful? Nothing. Well, almost nothing. He knew that most of them were born into families that had wealth and power.

What else? They had received fine educations, though not as often as you'd think at a graduate level.

Anything else? No, that was it. There were exceptions who didn't fit that general rule, but most of the wealthy and powerful did.

All right, could he think of a source of pictures of men between the ages of 37 and 44 who come from rich families and are well educated? Vic couldn't think of one. But. . . if he didn't wait until they were 37 to 44, if he went back to the time they were 20 or 21, there *was* a source—college yearbooks!

Vic sat at the small table in the kitchenette and made a list of all the more prestigious schools: Yale, Princeton, Harvard. . . He figured it would be best to limit the list to eastern schools at first. Later, if he had to, he could expand it to include other sections of the country and Europe.

He returned to the livingroom and picked up the telephone book. He found both the Harvard and Yale Clubs listed. He called them and was told they did have a file of yearbooks in their libraries. Vic made appointments at both later that evening, but he never got to the Yale Club. He found the look-alike staring out at him from the pages of the 1958 Harvard yearbook.

Henry C. Dalton was his name. The face was considerably younger than that shown in Miller's photographs, but the resemblance was fantastic. Here was the same naturally curly hair, square jaw and serious dark eyes. Vic had no doubt that, as the face matured, it would change in the direction of Miller's photos. For that matter, because the picture was almost two decades old, Vic was sure that Henry C. Dalton must already resemble them exactly.

Before entering the Harvard Club, Vic had put a length of string into his mouth, hoping he would have a use for it. He had been chewing it all the while he looked through the yearbooks in the club library. As soon as the attendant who had accompanied him was distracted for a moment, answering a member's question, Vic laid the wet string along the page with Dalton's picture on it and closed the book. He waited a few moments, then opened the book again, retrieved the string, and silently tore that page from the book along the wet line made by the string. He slipped it under his jacket, thanked the attendant for his help, and left the club.

He was so elated he wanted to go directly to Miller with the news. It was too late in the evening for that, though, so he reluctantly went home, where Linda Bryson was waiting. He told her about his success in finding the look-alike. Instead of the compliment he expected, she said, "Oh, that's pretty good."

"What do you mean, 'pretty good'?" Vic demanded in mock fury. "That's terrific! Finding him was nothing short of genius. A lesser man never could have done it, but I reached out and plucked him from a two-hundred-million population." He snapped his fingers. "Just like that."

He stopped and looked at her for a long moment, his head cocked to one side. She met his gaze calmly, without looking away. Finally he shook his finger at her and said, "You've been up to something."

Linda laughed and took his hand in both of hers. "Let me show you what I have been doing while you have been accomplishing so little." She sat him down on the couch and pointed proudly to a stack of heavy books piled on the coffee table. "I identified all of the pictures Miller gave you."

She picked up the top book, an illustrated treatise on ancient Greek art, and opened it to a place she had marked with a piece of paper. There was a full-page duplicate of the marble-bust photo. It was identified as from about 200 B.C. and was listed as being on display in the British Museum, London. "See?" she said proudly. "Didn't I tell you it was a couple of thousand years old?"

She didn't wait for an answer as she picked up another volume and opened it to a marked page. Here was a full-color reproduction of Raphael's "The School of Athens." The text explained the composition and gave enlarged details of the various figures, one of whom was Miller's man in the toga, and told how Pope Julius II had commissioned the work. Each figure represented a different Greek philosopher, but Raphael had given them the faces of well-known gentlemen of the day, including a self-portrait. The author went on to identify which philosopher was represented by each figure and told whose face it was thought he carried. Miller's man had been a Roman senator named Marcus Orvieto, noted for his limitless energy and ambition. He had been lost at sea in his ninetieth year.

Linda turned to another book to show a reproduction of "The Man in Black" by Velázquez. The painting was listed as being in a private collection, but both artist and subject were identified. Velázquez had been commissioned to paint a portrait of José Cotán Parma, a wealthy seventeenth-century Spanish nobleman. Parma was further identified as having been the Grand Inquisitor of Córdoba. A thick book about the Spanish Inquisition gave a short biography of Parma and told how



there had been a scandal and he had fled the city, never to be seen again.

"I've saved the best for last," Linda announced. "Remember, I guessed that the other man in uniform was Adolf Hitler? Well, I was right. I found a pictorial history of World War II with the same photo in it. It had been taken at a Nuremberg rally in 1935. The man looking back over his shoulder is Heinrich Herren, sort of a Nazi mystery man. At least I can't find very much written about him. He seemed to be wherever Hitler was, but he never held any high post in the government and avoided the limelight. This is the only photo I've been able to locate. According to another book, he disappeared in April 1945, just before the Red Army captured Berlin."

Vic lined up the four photos Miller had given him. "A busted statue of some Greek big shot, a Roman politician, a Spanish inquisitor and a German mystery man. They all look alike, and it's pretty certain they were all politicians—you don't preserve a nobody's face in marble—and if I remember right, the Spanish Inquisition was as much a political and social phenomenon as it was religious."

"Quite a coincidence," Linda said.

"Yeah," Vic answered, but he didn't look up from the photos.

*The chamber was cool and damp and lighted by pots of burning pitch that hung from iron hooks on the stone walls. The walls were shiny with moisture and gray fungus grew close to the floor in an irregular pattern. A steep stairway led upward along one wall, terminating at an iron door that was red with rust. Twenty-three captives were chained to the damp walls or anchored to iron rings in the floor. Whenever there was a sound from above, no matter how faint, all eyes turned to the iron door.*

*At last the door opened and the black-garbed Grand Inquisitor appeared, followed by two burly men in soiled pantaloons who were bare to the waist. While the two men went from prisoner to prisoner, checking chains and shackles, the Inquisitor stood impassively in the center of the floor. There were four families assembled here, eight adults and fifteen children who ranged in age from 4 to 19, including five teen-aged girls who were as badly frightened as everyone else.*

*"You go too far, Parma!" one of the chained men shouted angrily.*

*The Inquisitor ignored him and dismissed his men. They climbed the*

stone steps and disappeared behind the iron door, shutting it with a clang.

Perhaps emboldened by the retreat of the guards, or by the Inquisitor's failure to take action against the first man, another forced words from his parched throat. "Yes, you go too far! We are not Jews or Moors! Are you mad?"

"Release us at once!" another demanded. "You have much to answer for already, without adding to it!"

The Inquisitor disrobed, folding his black clothing carefully and placing it on one of the stone steps. Then he circled the chamber, calmly slitting the throats of all adults, small children and males, seemingly oblivious to their curses, prayers and pleas for mercy. The overpowering stench of spilled blood filled the dungeon, fouling the already fetid air still further. He saved the teenaged girls for last, but it didn't matter. His knife had been forged from the finest Toledo steel. It would have taken a thousand necks to dull it.

Carl Miller was propped up in bed, looking stronger, when Vic arrived. Vic gave the fat man the page from the yearbook and waited. Miller stared at the photo for several seconds before speaking. Then he seemed to call upon hidden reserves of strength.

"Good. You have done well," he said, sitting more erect.

"I've done better than well. I've done ten thousand dollar's worth."

"Perhaps. . . perhaps. . ."

"What do you mean 'perhaps'? That's your look-alike, isn't it? Henry C. Dalton looks almost exactly like those pictures you gave me."

"Yes, *almost*," Miller echoed the word.

"Sure, he's younger in the picture, but it was taken nearly twenty years ago. By now he *must* look exactly like the photos you gave me."

"Then you won't mind getting a more recent picture, will you?" Miller turned to the table beside him and picked up his checkbook and a pen. He quickly made out a check and handed it to Vic. "Expenses," he explained.

Vic looked at it and raised an eyebrow. "Two thousand dollars for a picture?"

"A picture and a few other things. You should also find out where and when he was born. And talk to his friends and teachers. Find out what he does now."

"That's all?" Vic asked sarcastically.

Miller ignored it. He took a couple of blue pills from a small box and washed them down with a swallow of water. A trickle of water escaped from the corner of his mouth and ran down his chin. He wiped it with the hand that had the star-shaped burn scar. He relaxed and a sigh slid past his thick lips. "And hurry," he added. "If you please."

*The tall American sergeant and his pretty dark-haired wife visited the orphanage on a Sunday. The institution was located on the outskirts of Hamburg in what had once been a row of Army barracks beside a bombed-out airfield. The matronly female attendants lined up all the little boys for inspection, each in clean but shabby clothing.*

*Neither the sergeant nor his wife spoke German, so they were having difficulty making themselves understood. They wanted to adopt a boy, but they wanted a little baby. These children were all between 5 and 10, not at all what they had in mind. They moved down the line of children, gesturing to the attendants and consulting a phrase book without success.*

*Then a frail, dark-eyed child with curly black hair stepped forward and took the wife's hand. When the sergeant and his lady drove away an hour later, they carried a sheaf of official papers to be processed, but they didn't for a moment think it was they who were doing the adopting.*

It hadn't been necessary for Carl Miller to tell Vic to hurry. Besides the fat man's rapidly failing health and the promise of ten thousand dollars that was being held out to him like a carrot on a stick, Vic had another reason to be speedy; he wanted to be done with the business. There was something about it that was making him uneasy. Also, he didn't like the fact that Miller was holding back his reasons for the search for a look-alike. That had been all right as long as Vic wasn't playing fair with him; but now that Vic was actually doing what he was being paid to do, he wanted to know why he was doing it.

He called Linda and told her he might be going out of town for a few days. He asked her to feed his goldfish and water his plants if he wasn't around for awhile. She agreed readily, as he knew she would.

Then he threw a couple of changes of clothing into an overnight case and drove out to the National Airport in Virginia. He had no idea what

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a trained investigator would do in his place, but he figured that was precisely why Miller had advertised for an amateur, not gone out and hired a professional. Miller must have some reason for doing it. Maybe he felt he would benefit from original thinking, or that Vic didn't have some negative quality a private detective would have.

There was a collection of out-of-state telephone books at the airport. Vic took out the yearbook page and compared the name of Henry C. Dalton and of Dalton's fellow graduates with the listings for major cities. When he found any that matched, he made note of it and kept looking. He spent over an hour with the phone books, made a dozen calls, and finally caught a shuttle flight to New York City.

Twelve days later Vic arrived back at National Airport at 6:00 in the morning, on a night coach from Salt Lake City. He was fifteen pounds lighter than when he had left and he was bone-weary.

It had rained off and on while he was gone and the windshield of his old car was streaked and dirty. He wiped it with his handkerchief, then tossed the soiled cloth away, dead-tired. He hadn't been able to sleep on the plane, but he wasn't thinking of bed. Thoughts of Carl Miller and what he'd learned about Henry C. Dalton raced through his mind.

He drove into the city and found a restaurant where he breakfasted on three aspirin and an equal number of cups of coffee to kill time. Then he called the hospital and spoke to Miller's private nurse. She told him Miller was much improved and would be leaving the hospital soon. He was sleeping, but would be awake within the next hour. Vic thanked her, hung up and drove to D.C. General.

Miller was awake and the nurse left them alone as before.

"Well?" Miller asked.

Vic dropped heavily into the chair beside the bed. "I did what you told me to do. I talked to his teachers and to his friends, old and new, asking questions about him. And I got a recent photo of him from the files of *The Salt Lake City Tribune*."

"Where was he born?"

"Germany. At least, that's as good a guess as any. He was in a German orphanage for displaced children when World War II ended, and he was adopted by an American couple. He was pretty young. All he knew about himself was his first name, and he didn't know anything at all about his real parents."

Vic took out a cigarette, lit it and sucked in a lungful of smoke before continuing. "He's come a long way since then. He was raised on a small sheep ranch outside of Vernal, Utah, went to Harvard on a full scholarship, and is now a state senator with every expectation of becoming Utah's next governor."

"Let me see the picture."

Vic handed it to him. "He wears a Vandyke," he said, preparing Miller for the beard.

Miller studied the photo in silence, then put it on the table beside him. His expression didn't change from one of polite curiosity, but he shifted his position slightly, giving away his increased interest. "What did his friends and teachers have to say about him?"

"Except for the people who are jealous of him, who feel threatened by having to compete with him, he's very well liked. And even his enemies are convinced he's a genius. Besides his native German and English, he speaks several other languages—French, Spanish, Italian and a few Middle Eastern dialects he picked up effortlessly while on archeological digs during summer vacations. The teacher who helped him prepare for the scholarship exams that brought him to Harvard is retired now, but she remembers Henry C. Dalton as the most mature teen-ager she ever taught. She said he seemed to know exactly where he was going in life and how he was going to get there. All of his former friends and instructors recall him for one reason or another. For instance, one of his professors in law school says he's the only student who ever cited the Code of Hammurabi in a practice brief, and his high school football coach said he was a fine natural athlete, but the dirtiest player he'd ever had. All he cared about was winning."

Miller rubbed his eyes. The star-shaped scar on the back of his hand was an angry red. He said, "You have done well. Now there is just one thing more. I want you to take me to him. I want to talk to him alone. Then I will give you your bonus."

"No, there's more than that," Vic contradicted, mentally kissing the ten thousand dollars goodbye before plunging on. "I want to know what's going on. This whole thing is pretty damned strange."

"It is not your concern."

"Yes, it is my concern. I'm *making* it my concern. While checking on Henry C. Dalton, I learned about Marcus Orviato, José Cotan Parma, and Heinrich Herren too. And Dalton owns the original of the

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Velásquez portrait of "The Man in Black."

Miller's eyes narrowed. "What else have you learned?"

"I found out that besides being look-alikes they have one other thing in common."

"And that is?"

"They didn't die," Vic answered.

Miller's jaw tightened, and Vic went on quickly. "I mean, they all disappeared mysteriously. And they all retained an extraordinarily youthful appearance well into their old age."

"So?"

"So I want to know what's going on. What are you up to? What's the connection between them and Henry Dalton, and why are you willing to spend so much money?"

"You are being paid to follow orders, not ask questions," Miller said.

"You won't tell me what's going on?" Vic demanded

"No! It is *not* your concern," Miller said firmly. Then he added, "Can it be you no longer wish to earn a bonus?"

"I want the bonus, all right, but I want some answers too. And if you won't give them to me, perhaps Henry Dalton will."

"No!" Miller shouted. Vic looked toward the door. "No," Miller repeated more quietly. "You will warn him. He will run away, and I will never find him again."

"Run away? Why would he do that? The man is a state senator."

"He is a murderer!" Miller snapped. "And I am the only one who knows. That animal killed my two daughters! He butchered them like swine!"

There was no ashtray in the room. Vic dropped what was left of his cigarette to the tile floor and extinguished it with the toe of his shoe. Then he sat back in the chair and crossed his legs. "Tell me about it," he said.

"In the war, World War Two, I was a General," Miller said. "I had nothing to do with slave labor or concentration camps. My specialty was military supply and transportation of troops—logistics—and that is why I was not accused of crimes when the war was over. I met Heinrich Herren at a party given in the Führer's honor. I was a general, but Herren had more power than I. He was one of Hitler's chief advisers. He had been a National Socialist from the beginning of the party, and Hitler listened to his every word. I invited Herren to dinner at my

home, and to my surprise he accepted."

Miller wiped his wet lips with the edge of the bed sheet and kept talking. "Herren had no family of his own. After he met my young daughters, Olga and Marta, he began to send them presents that even I could not get. This was in early 1944 and the war was not going well for Germany. The girls wore the French perfume and silk party dresses he sent, and called him Uncle Heinrich. When he was in Berlin, he would visit my home and take the children to the theater. My wife and I were happy to have such a powerful friend."

Miller cleared his throat. "When the Red Army was shelling Berlin, he appeared at the door of our apartment. I was away, and he told my wife he had come to take everyone to the Hitler bunker where we would be safe. The telephones were not working, so he sent my wife to my office to get me. We returned to find the building in flames. The other tenants and I rushed inside, up steps and along smoke-filled corridors to our apartment. Inside we found horror. Olga and Marta had been nailed to the floor with long steel spikes through their wrists and ankles, and their bodies had been torn open. Heinrich's blood-covered clothes were on the floor beside the girls, and one of my civilian suits was gone.

"The evidence was clear. Heinrich Herren had sent my wife away so he could butcher my little girls. They were fifteen and sixteen years. Babies only. I could not make my wife leave the girls, so I went for help. It was too late. The building collapsed as I ran from it, destroying my wife and the proof of Heinrich Herren's crime. But I carry this scar to remind me always of that day." He held up the hand with the star-shaped scar.

"I told no one. At that time, even if I were believed, no one would have cared. The city was under siege. Many people were taking that opportunity to settle old debts. The fact that I was a General mattered little. I vowed to track him down and bring him to justice myself. As long as he thought the fire had concealed his crime, I was sure he would be easy to find.

"Escape routes and secret funds had already been arranged for high-ranking officers. I fled to Switzerland as the war ended and activated a numbered account that had been established for me. I waited there for over a year. No war-criminal charges were brought against me, but the Allies were hunting for Heinrich Herren. They had ques-

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tions and a Nuremberg noose awaiting him.

"I followed the escape route to Egypt, then South Africa, and Argentina, and Peru. I sought out former officers, asking always for word of Heinrich Herren. No one had seen him. It was as though he no longer existed, but I knew better. I knew what a monster he was. Such men do not die easily or of natural causes.

"Then one day I was looking at an art book in a Lima *biblioteca* and I saw the Velásquez portrait of José Colán Parma, 'The Man in Black,' the Grand Inquisitor of Córdoba. One look, just one, and I knew they were the same man. Parma and Herren were the same man."

Carl Miller paused as though to gauge Vic's reaction, but Vic was too stunned to do anything except sit quietly and stare back at him.

"I learned all I could about Parma. He had fled from Córdoba after slaughtering a number of Castilian families. His butchery of the young girls was particularly savage. That made me all the more certain that Parma and Herren were the same. From then on it was a simple matter to track him backward and forward in time. He was in Paris at the time of the French Revolution. He was in Italy during the Renaissance. He was an English privateer. . . . Every fifty or sixty years he became someone else and he would be that new person until something happened to make him flee for his life and become a child again."

Vic found his voice. "Are you talking about reincarnation?"

"Nein—no, it is the *same* man. He does *not* die. He lives on century after century. I have seen paintings and statues of him with beards of various sizes. I have read descriptions of him where no likeness survived. It is the same man. His left palm was slashed by a Moslem sword during the Crusades and Heinrich Herren had the scar! It is the same man!"

"But how does he manage to become younger? If he is human enough to be injured, how does he stop time and turn it back for himself?" Vic spoke in a tone of exaggerated reasonableness. He wished he had paid more attention to the courses he had taken in clinical psychology. There might have been something there that would help him now, but he felt helpless to deal with Miller.

"He kills young girls," Miller replied in the very same tone. "He kills them and. . . and eats a part of their bodies. For each victim I calculate he gains seven more years of life. I think he keeps himself



youthful by committing one murder every ten or twelve years. And in an extreme emergency, or when he has led a life too long, he takes as many lives as is necessary to make him appear to be a harmless, innocent child so he can begin again."

Vic told Linda what he had learned about Henry C. Dalton, and recounted as accurately as he could exactly what Miller had told him.

"Well, what do *you* think?" Linda wanted to know.

"What can I think? The man is completely mad, of course."

Linda slid closer to him on the couch. "Yes, but isn't it weird how it all fits together? Thousands of years ago the priests, the rulers, used to sacrifice virgins. Why virgins? Why not old men, or babies? What if they actually *did* discover some miracle combination they could take from the bodies? It's possible. The pharmaceutical companies today extract many of their drugs from animal and human glands. And glands change with age and when different hormonal balances take place. That would explain why the victims must be young virgins. A dose of LSD is only one ten-thousandth of a gram. So even a small amount of a drug can have a devastating effect if it's powerful enough."

Vic sat looking at her. "You're as crazy as Miller is," he accused.

Linda flashed a wry smile and put her arms around his neck. "I said it's *possible*, silly. I *didn't* say it's *probable*. But just in case it is, I want to thank you for saving me from a fate worse than death." She kissed him. "What's going to happen now?" she asked.

"Miller is going to see Henry C. Dalton."

"Are you going to take him?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. Besides, there's still a slight chance that Miller will pay that bonus before he's carted off to the funny farm."

With Vic at the wheel, Vic and Miller drove directly to Senator Dalton's home from the airport, arriving in front of the sprawling ranch-style residence at two in the morning.

"Don't you think this is an odd hour to visit unannounced?" Vic said.

"What is that room?" Miller asked, pointing to where light spilled across the lawn.

"How would I know?" Vic said.

Miller pushed open the car door and struggled out of the seat.

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"He may not be home," Vic said. "Maybe his wife is up late washing her hair or something."

Miller didn't answer. He turned and trudged across the lawn toward the light. Vic hesitated a moment, then slid from behind the wheel and followed without pausing to close the door of the car.

The light was coming from a book-lined study. A man was sitting at a kidney-shaped desk, busy with a stack of papers. On the wall behind him hung Velásquez's "The Man in Black."

Vic was still outside the shaft of light when Miller charged across a small patio and threw open a pair of French doors. "Heinrich!" he shouted, hurling the name ahead of him like a bomb.

The man looked up with a calmness that made Vic come to a sliding halt while still outside the light. "Hello, Carl, my old friend," he answered "It has been a long time."

Vic thought, it's all true! He ran back to the car and went for the police.

"You read most of it in the papers, but there are still a few things you don't know," Vic said. His face was gaunt, and there were dark circles under his eyes. "When I got back with the police, Senator Dalton was dead, and Miller was gone. I saw the palm of Dalton's left hand. There was a broad scar, the kind you'd get if a deep cut were allowed to heal without being stitched closed, the kind of scar Miller said Heinrich Herren had. Dalton had been shot three times at close range. His wife was in the next room, also shot to death, and their daughter was in her bed. She had been butchered with a knife from their kitchen. If I'd stayed there, Miller probably would have killed me too.

"I told the police about Dalton and Herren being look-alikes, but I didn't mention the others. I just said Miller had the crazy idea that they were the same man and he blamed Dalton for his family's deaths in Berlin. They kept me in jail for a week while they searched the law books for something to charge me with, then kicked me out of the state."

Linda leaned toward him and put her hand on his arm. "Except for the part about the scar on Dalton's palm, I read everything else in the newspapers."

"The police are looking for a 77-year-old man with a bad heart, hop-

ing to catch him before he has a fatal attack." Vic slammed his right fist into his left palm. "They've about as much chance of finding him as I have of growing wings."

Linda frowned. "Why do you say that?"

"Because Dalton told Miller the secret before he was killed. He probably thought it would buy his life. He had treated life so cheaply for centuries that he couldn't imagine anyone attaching importance to any life except his own."

"Are you sure he told him the secret?"

"Yes." Vic took out a newspaper clipping. "Look at this. There was a fire the night after Dalton was killed, and four Brigham Young University co-eds were pulled from the ashes. At least, what was left of them was. That would be a perfect way to disguise ritual murder. And look at this." He produced another clipping. "This one's from *The Chicago Sun-Times*. A few days later a 14-year-old high school girl was dragged into an alley and butchered within a block of her home."

Vic produced clippings from Detroit, Cleveland and Buffalo newspapers, telling about similar knife murders. The Buffalo crime was a double homicide in a laundromat. The noise of the machines had drowned out the victim's cries. "Including Dalton's daughter, that makes ten," Vic said. "If Miller was right, one victim is needed to wipe away seven years of age—and he was right about everything else, so there's no reason to doubt him now. That means there's a blood-covered 7-year-old out there somewhere, starting a new life."

"What are you going to do?"

"There can't be more than one gray-eyed waif with a star-shaped burn scar on the back of his hand," Vic said. "I'm going to find him."



*Then it came to him—how to take reality by the horns and make his dream come true . . .*

# Ladies' Man

by James McKimmey



**P**aul Ridgely, a handsome, black-haired man of thirty, sat at an unfinished pine desk in the small cubicle that formed an office at the rear of his delicatessen. Alyce, his red-haired, overplump wife, was up front serving customers. And Ridgely was using this time, away from the annoying business of being pleasant to people, thinking of Louise Morton.

A montage of memories swept by. And they were of all the times

she'd come into the deli, a regal and fragile-looking woman, soft-spoken, unfailingly polite, with the tasteful air of a woman married to a highly successful lawyer named Kenneth B. Morton.

And he was remembering, too, how many times he, Ridgely, had stepped outside for a breath of fresh morning air, instead of receiving the aromas of pastrami and kosher dills, and seen the tall graceful Morton walking along the street toward the train that would carry him north to his offices in the city. You could judge the capabilities of the man by his manner, moving along in his expensive clothing, briefcase in hand. . . and you could also judge how much he received for those capabilities.

Well, Ridgely thought, if he'd only had the same early advantages he was certain Morton had had, then he too, could have been just as successful in the practice of law. He'd always imagined that he would have been a highly effective attorney, especially in the courtroom, with his personality, voice, and capacity to cut straight through to essential truths. Law. Or even medicine. With better breaks he might have been a very notable surgeon indeed. Either one. . .

And then he was back to thinking about Louise Morton, blonde and lovely wife of Kenneth B. Morton, and a woman with whom Ridgely had fallen in love.

She did not know that, of course, not precisely, despite their conversation the last time he'd waited on her in the store. And now that particular occasion became his single memory, vivid and precise.

She almost always arrived in the late afternoon, after Ridgely had sent Alyce, a mistake in marital judgment if one ever existed, home to prepare their dinner. And Louise Morton had come in, saying a bit breathlessly as was her habit, "Good afternoon, Paul. Isn't this a lovely spring day?"

And it became that instantly, as he replied, "It certainly is, Mrs. Morton." He smiled the good smile he knew he had, always white and sincere-appearing no matter his thoughts, then added, "Especially now."

He watched her pale-green eyes carefully and saw them show surprise, then a faint gleam of pleasure—he was quite certain of the latter. Women had always been attracted to him, he knew, including most of those who came into the deli—whether they tried to hide the fact or not. And that was what Louise Morton was doing now, hiding her in-

terest by becoming businesslike as she moved along the display case, choosing this and that.

And then, feeling positive that now was the time, he said, very casually, "It's odd. I mean you come here for the meats, the salads, the cheeses. And it's a business transaction between us, nothing more. Yet . . . we *have* come to know one another. Personally, I mean."

She paused, then said, "To a certain degree, yes." Again she was looking at him with surprise and, again, with that gleam of pleasure; she simply could not hide that from him. "But I'm not sure I know exactly what you're saying, Paul."

He laughed gently. "I'm simply trying to say what a nice thing it's been, getting to know you and seeing you so often."

She nodded, looking at him steadily. "And?"

"Well," he said, feeling a rush of encouragement, wondering why he hadn't chosen this path long before, "I do think it would be nice if we got to know each other even better."

"In what fashion?"

"I was thinking of. . . simply a drink together? Somewhere? Now?"

She did not respond.

"Alyce is home getting dinner," he said. "And I'm sometimes late."

"I see."

"And, ah, Mr. Morton usually works evenings in the city, doesn't he? When I've worked here late some nights I've seen him walking home from the train."

"He works long hours," she said crisply. "That's why he walks to the station and back. It's the only real exercise he gets. Now—you want me to have a drink with you somewhere? Right now?"

"I was in a very pleasant place down the peninsula once. They don't know me. They possibly don't know you. But, anyway, we could be discussing things you might need for a party you're planning, right? What could be so wrong about our having a drink together for that reason? In this day and age?"

"Just like that. Out of nowhere."

"Not out of nowhere," he said honestly.

"Do you really think I'd do that, Paul?"

"I'd like to hope you would. Alyce has our car, but—"

"But I have mine, is that is?"

"I could start walking home. You could just pick me up on the way."

It would look like you were just doing me a favor. What do you think. . . Louise?"

She shook her head slightly, gazing at him with her green eyes. "I'm a very happily married woman because I'm married to a very good husband who loves me as much as I love him. I'm sorry if I've given you some other impression. I didn't mean to, if I did. How much do I owe you, Paul?"

As he collected for her purchases and made change, he felt his best hopes deflating. But he was certain, just the same, that he had not been mistaken about how she *really* felt about him. She'd spoken about love in her marriage, but was it really her reliance upon her husband's importance, position, money—all of those things that gave her the life she wanted? Was it simply the fear of jeopardizing all of that?

And how would it be if her husband weren't in the way of things? How would she conduct herself in that case? No, he thought, she could not hide from him what he knew to be true: her strong attraction to him, Paul Ridgely.

She put the change in her purse, picked up the bag he'd prepared for her and said in a cool voice, "Goodbye, Paul."

That had been three weeks ago. She hadn't been in the store since. But he knew why—she simply did not trust herself in his presence. She was fearful, he was certain, that she might waver and give in to her emotions, thereby endangering her precious and safe marriage to Kenneth B. Morton. But if the man did not exist. . .

"Paul?" he heard, followed by rapping on the door of the small office. It was Alyce, and she knew well enough he had the door locked because she was constantly intruding when he didn't want it.

"Yes!" he said sharply.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm busy."

"At what?"

"Doing something I don't want interrupted."

"I wish you'd tell me."

"Is that all you want? To know what I'm doing in here?"

"We're getting low on provolone."

"Well then, let's order some more provolone."

"When are you coming out?"

He envisioned her on the other side of the door. He'd once thought her to be seductively attractive, but now. . .

"I'll tell you when I'm coming out, Alyce," he said.

"When?"

"Possibly never."

When she'd given up, he returned to his thoughts of Louise Morton—and he suddenly unlocked the desk's single drawer with a small key. Kenneth B. Morton—he was all that barred Paul's possession of her beauty, her charms. Without him, Louise Morton would come to Paul on the run. If only. . .

He took out a sheet of plain stationery from the drawer, lifted a pen, and let his imagination travel, thinking of things as they should be. He'd always been an excellent letter writer; people had told him so. Why he could not boost that talent into producing a dazzling novel that would propel him to the vast riches and fame he deserved he didn't know, but that was another dream. In the meantime he would write something else.

"Dear Mrs. Morton,

Even though I have known you only as a customer, I have grown to respect you so much that I want you to know my singular dismay in learning of your loss of Mr. Morton. I send you my deepest sympathies. As does Alyce.

Most sincerely,

Paul Ridgely (proprietor/delicatessen)."

He read what he had written, realizing that his frustration was only increased. If only such a letter could make it a reality. Still, it was something. Something to remind him how it might be one day. He slipped the paper back into the drawer, turned the lock, got up, opened the door, and went out to punish his wife with his anger.

At home in bed that night he could not escape his thoughts of Louise Morton. Finally he got up and went into the living room to brood.

Then it came to him—how to take reality by the horns and make his dream come true. . .

The next day in the delicatessen he was silent and aloof. Alyce kept



saying, "You're so quiet. You don't even give me the dickens. What's the matter, Paul?"

He didn't answer.

"What are you *thinking*?"

"Do you truly believe that might be any of your business, Alyce?"

"I'd give a penny to know," she said. "A nickel even."

"Fix the macaroni salad, please."

Back home, he ate dinner quickly, then got up saying, "I've got to go back and work on the books tonight."

"Oh, shoot."

"And don't phone me, Alyce. Just please don't. I'm going back to work, not chat on the phone. Do you understand?"

"Well, I don't understand *you* today."

As he drove away from his house, he thought of the way Louise Morton had looked at him the last time he had seen her. That had revealed all, he was quite certain—how it would be if she had no worries about losing her husband's assets. But if he were removed from existence, she would still retain those assets, wouldn't she? The money, the property, the insurance?

Oh, yes. And that would leave her free to explore a relationship with Paul Ridgely. Which would open up, very certainly, the possibility of a permanent relationship between them, so that he could say goodbye to Alyce and the cold cuts.

He drove directly to the library, searched the index cards, then the shelves, and found the book he wanted. The subject was the repossessing of automobiles. He took it to a table and read about bent steel hooks, filed-down keys and hot wires. He wrote careful entries into a small notebook he carried. Then he went to the train station where he acquired a timetable.

When he got to the delicatessen he read the timetable and reviewed again and again the notes he'd taken in the library.

As it turned to darkness outside, he went to the front and sat near the window without the lights on. After awhile a familiar slim figure, carrying a briefcase, appeared, walking along the street. Kenneth B. Morton had taken the 8:06 out of the city, Paul decided. . .

The following morning, leaving Alyce to care for the deli, Paul purchased some carefully selected equipment in a town further down the peninsula, then drove home and put the car in the garage, where

he'd installed a workbench. He tucked his keys in his pocket and began experimenting. He'd always had a capacity for the mechanical. By noon he'd opened the car door and started the engine without using his own key.

He placed the items he'd used to accomplish that in the bottom of an old trunk in the garage, then returned to the delicatessen where Alyce asked, "Where have you *been*?"

He looked along the display counter and said, "We're low on cole slaw."

— He was in the darkened deli each night for the rest of the week. And on each of those nights Kenneth Morton went by at the same time. Ridgely, leaving the store and following him at a careful distance, saw that he was a creature of habit. He always used the same route home, walking the same side of the street, crossing at the same corners and arriving at his spacious house, where his wife, knowing his precise arrival time, would be in the open doorway to welcome his return.

Friday night Ridgely stood in the shadows witnessing another warm greeting. And in his mind he displaced Morton with himself.

When at last he drove home, Alyce complained about his nightly absences with a harping monotony. But he disregarded her. Instead, with a pulsating excitement, he anticipated his carefully planned, upcoming Monday night.

On Monday evening, a half hour before Morton was due to arrive on the train and begin his walk home, Ridgely transferred his newly purchased equipment from the garage trunk to his car. He also had with him a pair of light leather gloves and a small flashlight. He'd told Alyce that he would be at the books again, and now he drove away, reviewing his plans.

The car he wanted was a blue sedan he'd observed every night he had trailed Kenneth Morton home. It was always parked in shadows created by two large oaks, in his own residential district, approximately three miles from the wealthier area where Louise and Kenneth Morton lived.

He was calm as he parked on a residential avenue two blocks from where the blue sedan should be. He left his car, carrying the items he would be using, and moved ahead quickly, grateful that no one was in

sight. When he reached the blue sedan, he stood in the shadows, looking at the cottage adjacent to it, perched above a neatly kept terrace. There were no lights in front; the resident—and probable owner of the car—must, he decided, be in the rear somewhere.

Wearing the gloves and using the small flash, he went to work.

Moments after he'd started the engine, he was driving away at high speed. He traversed the three miles to the point he'd chosen to park this car, then stopped there, with the engine running. He found himself breathing hard, and his hands began to tremble again.

He checked his watch with the flash and saw that Kenneth Morton was due to pass in five minutes. He waited, the minutes stretching into eternities, then Morton appeared from behind the blue sedan and passed it, moving on toward the intersection ahead.

As he left the sidewalk to cross to the other side, Ridgely sent the blue sedan forward, tires squealing. He sped toward the intersection, and now Morton, halfway across, turned at his approach. He appeared uncertain, then in panic started back to the curb he had left. Then, as though in a dream, it was over, and Ridgely was speeding on, two more blocks, then three, before he brought the car to a jarring halt. He leaped out and went on at a run until he was well away from the deadly instruments he'd used. . .

After he'd placed the equipment he'd used back in the garage trunk; he went inside. Alyce chattered at him about his continued absences but he heard nothing. He went to bed and lay there, waiting for the telephone to ring, the door chimes to sound. Neither happened.

The next morning, with no sleep, but feeling entirely alert, he drove Alyce to the delicatessen. He bought the morning newspaper at a nearby stand. The story about Kenneth Morton was on the front page. He returned to the store without seeing more than the headline, and went into his office. There he began reading the details:

Kenneth B. Morton was most assuredly no longer alive. The driver who had hit him and run was as yet unknown. The owner of the car believed to have killed Morton had reported its theft minutes before officers estimated the lawyer had been struck down. . .

Ridgely was smiling now. He folded the newspaper and placed it in a wastebasket. It was done, successfully, and there was nothing more to do but savor thoughts of the future.

He got out the key for his desk, opened the drawer, and looked for the undated letter he now intended to send. It was not there.

He sat with fast-beating heart, then he hurled himself up and out of the room, shouting at Alyce, "Were you in my desk!"

She blinked, pink face flushing. "I—"

"Tell me!"

"Well, you've been acting so . . . strange these last days. And not interested in me at all. I got so worried. And jealous. I thought maybe there was something in that drawer. Something about somebody you were seeing. Her name or phone number. And I knew you had a second key for the desk in the bedroom bureau at home. So I took it and went in the office about three days ago, I think it was, when you were busy out here. I looked in the drawer and found a letter. I didn't read it then because I heard you coming. I just folded it up and locked the drawer again. I didn't get a chance to look at it until we'd gone home and had dinner and you'd left home again, like you've been doing. Then I read it. And I felt so terrible, Paul. Honestly. Because it was such a kind and thoughtful note to that nice Mrs. Morton. I've only waited on her a few times, but I remember her because she was always so polite. I didn't know her husband had died, poor thing. So I thought you'd just forgotten to mail it. Well, I remembered her husband's first name, on account of how important he was, and I looked in the telephone book and found her address. I put the letter in an envelope and stamped it and took it to the corner and mailed it. I was going to tell you I'd done that—only then I got to thinking you'd just get so darned mad at me for getting into the desk. . ."

The telephone on the wall behind Ridgely began ringing.

Continuing to look at Alyce, Paul, breathing hard, stepped backward and lifted the phone from the hook. "Yes," he managed.

"Is that you, Paul?" said a familiar voice.

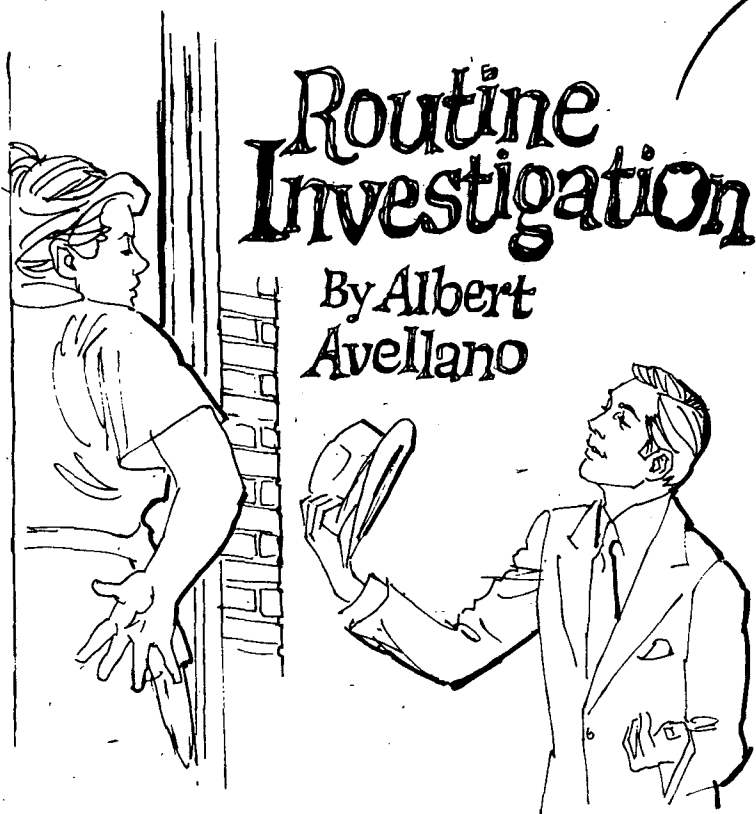
"Yes," he said again, whispering now.

"I received a letter from you this morning postmarked two days ago." The icy voice stopped, and was replaced with a tone rising to a near scream, saying:

*"How did you know I was going to be a widow!"*

Ridgely stood with the receiver in his hand, understanding all that was going to happen to him now. Alyce stared at him beseechingly but she blurred before him in a redness of hopeless rage.

*Odd, isn't it, that when people are questioned they tell more than they are asked ? . . .*



**T**he private road ended at a small circle, lined by six expensive homes. The architectural styles ranged from ornate colonial to sprawling ranch and functional modern. The only thing they all had in common was the fact that each had once carried a price tag in excess of two hundred thousand dollars.

The product of Detroit he drove would have been inconspicuous almost anywhere else, but here its compact size, black-walled tires and

single-color paint job marked him as an outsider as unmistakably as if he had been driving a garbage truck or had painted himself green.

He parked in the shade of an elm tree, climbed from behind the wheel, and stretched his arms as he surveyed the scene. He was a medium-sized, big-boned man with eyes, ears, nose and mouth positioned in a face as easily forgotten as a New Year's resolution. He could never have been a movie hero, but there was a time when his type had flourished as the hero's best friend.

He approached the front door of the nearest home, a two-story colonial with carved white shutters and window boxes crowded with pink and yellow flowers. It was difficult to imagine a crime being committed in a neighborhood like this, but he had to make his investigation. This section of Long Island wasn't as far removed from Manhattan and the Bronx as its residents liked to believe, and it was common for Manhattan and Bronx crimes to have dozens of witnesses and still go unreported.

He pressed the button beside the door, paused a moment, then pushed it again. While he waited, he consulted a small notebook.

He pressed the button a third time just as the door swung open and a stout middle-aged woman wearing a small white apron over her cotton-print housedress stood in the opening.

"Yes?" she said.

"I'm Detective Sergeant Karns," he said, producing a leather folder and showing her a gold badge and a plastic-laminated card with his picture on it. "Are you—" he consulted his notebook again "—Mrs. Greer?"

"No. I'm Mrs. Greer's housekeeper."

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Greer if she is at home."

The woman stepped aside to admit him. She led him to a small sitting room and said, "I'll tell Mrs. Greer you are here."

After a short wait, a tiny gray-haired woman appeared. He went through the formality of identifying himself again, then got down to business. "Did you see or hear anything unusual early this morning between the hours of three and four?"

The old woman shook her head. "I always retire at ten."

"You didn't hear any loud noises?"

"I sleep very soundly." She was apologetic. "I take pills, you see."

"Then it's possible there were some loud noises you didn't hear?"

"Perhaps."

"Do you think your housekeeper may have heard something?"

"No. She doesn't live in. She leaves in the early evening."

"Is there anyone else living here?"

"I've lived alone since my husband died," she said.

"Well—" he gave a boyish shrug—"guess that's all."

"What is supposed to have happened?" she asked.

"There's nothing to worry about," he assured her. "This is just a preliminary investigation. . ."

It took a long time to get an answer at the next house. The door was finally opened by a bearded man wearing a diamond-studded medallion hanging from a heavy gold chain. The man's shirt and trousers were rumpled as though he had been sleeping in them, but his clear gray eyes were alert, and the sound of loud, discordant music from inside made it unlikely he'd been asleep. The beard parted to reveal a double row of shiny white teeth. "What's happening, baby?" the man asked.

"Detective Sergeant Karns," he announced, flipping open his badge case long enough to show the glint of metal but not much else. "Are you Mr. Chase? I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"My home is your home," the man said with a low mocking bow and an inviting sweep of his arm. He followed Karns into the house and then moved ahead of him. The sound of music grew louder. The furnishings were all new and expensive-looking but the tables carried a film of dust and someone had thrown an empty beer can at a chandelier. It hung there, wedged among the crystal.

They stopped at a room containing several couches and a half dozen upholstered chairs. Approximately twenty wildly dressed people lounged about. Most were sitting on, lying across, or leaning against large floor cushions, but a few had invented odd postures and were trying to match them to the overstuffed furniture. The music came from a multi-speakered console against one wall. It was a piece of custom equipment designed for a recording studio. A tape was slowly winding from one reel to another and passing through a pick-up head.

Chase clapped his hands toward someone near the console. An arm was raised, a switch was thrown, and the sound abruptly stopped. "Your attention, please," Chase said, imitating the inflection of a tour-guide. "We have the police with us this morning."

A couple in a far corner ground out their thin cigarettes with elaborate casualness and pushed the ashtray out of sight under a couch.

"All right, baby," Chase said. "What's on your mind?"

"Did any of you see or hear anything unusual early this morning?"

That brought a roar of laughter from the room. A few people looked at each other and shook their heads as though they were embarrassed for him.

"This party's been going on for three days," Chase explained. "And, baby, there have been some frantic sights and sounds."

"I mean, outside the house."

Chase glanced around the room and was met by expressionless faces "No, baby," he said, turning back. "Nobody noticed anything."

Chase led the way back to the front door. Halfway there, the music started again, and they had to talk louder.

"I had the whole house soundproofed before I moved in," Chase said. "I didn't want to bug the neighbors, and I didn't want them to bug me. Know what I mean? I bet you could set off a cannon outside and we'd never hear it."

"All this must have cost quite a bit."

"It's only money," Chase said with a wink. "I write songs about the joys of the simple life, baby, and that's very, very profitable. . ."

The next home was pseudo-Spanish in design with ornamental iron grills on the windows and a mammoth door of rough-hewn redwood. Large-headed bronze nails had been driven into the door to form the initials "G. M." He bypassed it and went on to the next house.

When five minutes passed and no one had answered his ring, he turned to move away. The front door of the house on the far side of it opened and a short stocky man stepped out. The man was in his fifties and wore a conservative suit and a dark, striped tie. "There's no one home," he called. "The Huttons have gone to their summer home on Martha's Vineyard."

The ritual with the badge followed, and then, "Thank you, Mr. Snyder. I'm Detective Sergeant Karns. You didn't happen to see or hear anything unusual early this morning, did you?"

"This has to do with that racketeer George Morgan, doesn't it?" He gestured toward the Spanish-style home Karns had skipped.

"What makes you say that?"

"Because there've been a lot of detectives around here in the months since he moved in. And the newspaper this morning said he was involved in some kind of gang war—the syndicate wants to take over his



rackets. I was looking out my front window when you arrived, and I saw you stop at Mrs. Greer's and also at that—that *musician's*. But you didn't stop at Morgan's home. You didn't even ring his bell. I figure that means you're looking for information he can't or won't give you." Snyder was so pleased with himself that he puffed out his chest as though he expected to receive a medal.

"You'd make a good detective," Karns said, watching the man swell with pride. "But you haven't answered my question. Did you see or hear anything this morning—particularly between three and four?"

"No . . . no, I didn't," Snyder answered reluctantly. It was clear he wished he had something to report. "What happened?"

"Perhaps nothing. That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Say!" Snyder's face lit up. "I just remembered—that's about the time Morgan gets home from the nightclub he owns. My wife and I have our bedrooms in the rear of the house, so we can't hear traffic or other sounds from out here; but one night I couldn't sleep, and I saw Morgan arrive home at just about that time."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Snyder," Karns said. He turned toward the last of the houses on the circle.

"You won't get any help there," Snyder said. "They've gone to the Vineyard with the Huttons. Won't be back for a couple of weeks."

"Well, thanks again," Karns said. "You've been a great help."

Snyder followed him to where his car was parked and leaned through the window as he started the engine. "This used to be a very exclusive area, but now it's changed. It seems anyone with a few hundred thousand can move right in. That musician has some strange friends coming around all the time and—say, do you think those syndicate people will be coming around here too?"

"I don't think you have anything to worry about," Karns told him. He gave a wave of his hand and drove away.

Karns didn't start looking for a telephone until he had driven all the way back to Brooklyn. When he saw a booth beside a service station, he made his call while the attendant was filling his tank.

"I've just completed my preliminary investigation," he told his boss. "Everything looks fine. Morgan arrives home between three and four, just as we figured, and no one is likely to see or hear anything. To be on the safe side, though, I'll use a silencer on my pistol."

*A recurring dream, a race with death, a terrible legend . . .*

# TO RIDE A BLACK HORSE

by Stephen Wasylyk



**K**endrick awoke suddenly, terror-stricken, hearing the drumming of his blood in his ears, feeling the perspiration trickling down his neck, and it was long moments before the peaceful afternoon sun shining through the window and the gentle breeze billowing the curtains convinced him he was in his own study and there was nothing to fear.

It was only the dream again.

He shifted in his chair and sat up slowly, his arm numb and one leg

tiff because the chair had not been designed for sleeping.

He had worked until three in the morning, his eyes finally too heavy to stay open, and he had lowered himself into the chair intending only to relax but he had been sandbagged by almost twenty hours of continuous writing.

He could hear his wife running water and clattering dishes in the kitchen and he wondered why she had let him sleep so long.

If she had wakened him, perhaps he wouldn't have had the dream again.

The dream.

It always came suddenly and with no reason, usually just as he was lingering between wakefulness and oblivion, infrequently at first but lately every time he closed his eyes. There were never any preliminaries. Suddenly he was hunched over the neck of a coal-black horse, the horse racing with long strides toward a stone fence beyond which the spring-flowered trees of an apple orchard seemed to offer a sanctuary from some unseen terror that followed him closely. He urged the horse on, feeling the great muscles straining until they gathered and unwound in a gigantic effort and propelled animal and man over the wall. Then, at the top of the arc, Kendrick would feel a tremendous numbing blow in his lower back and he would lose his seat in the saddle, falling, knowing as he fell he had been fleeing Death and Death had won the race.

That was when he always jerked awake, filled with fear and understanding nothing because everything was always so real: the dew glistening on the grass, the wind in his face, the feel of the horse beneath him, the beauty of the apple blossoms in the early dawn.

The dream could be no long-forgotten memory that had sunk into his subconscious and was now making itself felt. Kendrick had never been on a horse in his life. There was no reason for the dream at all.

He left the chair and flipped through the last few pages of the manuscript he had completed the night before, feeling no interest in the words now, scooping the sheets into a neat stack and leaving them on his desk.

In the kitchen, Nora looked up as he entered, then turned back to her dishes. There was no welcoming smile. Kendrick didn't expect one. She had been building a wall between them for some time and Kendrick was losing interest in knocking it down.

"Hungry?" she asked.

"Only for coffee," he said.

She poured a cup for him and went back to the sink. She was a small woman, two years younger than Kendrick, who was thirty-five. She had long dark hair and a strong face, the cheekbones prominent and the eyes tilted slightly at the corners.

"I am going shopping in town," she said. "Is there anything you need?"

"Nothing," Kendrick said, knowing that she hated shopping, the isolation of this house and the lack of excitement in the country. She would have preferred an apartment in the city, a prospect that Kendrick disliked as much as she hated the country.

"I would like to see Dr. DeLong," he said. "Can you drop me off?"

She studied him for a moment. "Something wrong?"

"No," Kendrick said. "There's a medical detail in the novel I want to check."

"Will you want me to wait?"

He shook his head. "I thought I'd throw my bicycle in the station wagon and ride back. I can use the exercise."

She shrugged. "If that's what you want. I'll be ready in a few minutes."

Kendrick went outside and stowed his bicycle in the back of the wagon. Having only one car was one of the things that annoyed his wife, but he didn't care. Kendrick never liked cars, tolerating them as a necessary evil and driving as little as possible. He never really went very far from the house and his bicycle was more than adequate for his needs. His wife could manage without the car the few times he needed it.

She came out, a light sweater thrown over her shoulders, and Kendrick had to admit she was an attractive woman. If he couldn't hold her, he wished her well, as long as she made the break clean and definite before becoming involved with anyone else. Kendrick had a very firm attitude toward infidelity, an attitude he had inherited from his father who had killed Kendrick's mother for that very reason and had, afterward, slipped into a world no one else could enter, never recognizing his son from that day on and wasting away after a few years in a mental hospital. Kendrick had felt like a stranger at the funeral.

His wife had turned from the driveway onto the road before she

asked, "Is the novel finished?" It was the first interest she had indicated in his work in months.

"Yes," Kendrick said, "except for a few touches I'll take care of this evening."

"Will you mail it in or deliver it yourself?"

"I'll be taking it in. There are a few things to be discussed."

She pulled up before Dr. DeLong's office in one of the larger, older homes on the outskirts of the small town. Kendrick extricated the bicycle from the rear of the wagon and Nora drove off. Kendrick made his way up the short driveway alongside the house, through a neatly kept flower garden and down a couple of cement steps to a basement door.

He leaned his bike against the wall, opened the door and stepped into the small waiting room.

He always felt as though he had taken a step into the past. There wasn't a thing in the waiting-room that was less than fifty years old, in style if not in actuality. The lights were converted gas lamps, the rugs plush, the furniture and draperies lifted out of the Gay Nineties. Even the pictures on the walls looked as if they had been salvaged from someone's attic.

An old man was sitting, waiting, stooped and white-haired, his skin wrinkled, and that seemed entirely appropriate to Kendrick. A fresh-faced teen-ager in that room, wearing jeans and sneakers, would have been a jarring note.

A man poked his head out of an inner door, smiled at Kendrick and motioned to the old man. He tottered into the office, the door closed and Kendrick picked up a magazine that was several months old.

Whatever was wrong with the old man, it took a long time before DeLong came to the door again. The doctor was short and barrel-chested, his face round, his hair combed back to cover a well-advanced bald spot. He wore a well-cut tweed coat with leather patches at the elbows. He held the door open for Kendrick, followed him into the office and motioned to the chair alongside the desk.

Kendrick had never liked the office. It was an extension of the waiting-room, furnished in the same period, dim with the same too-soft lighting except for the bright lamp that threw a harsh pool on DeLong's desk top. Kendrick neither liked nor disliked DeLong himself, but found him a necessary source of medical information when he ran into a problem in one of his books.

"What seems to be your trouble?" asked DeLong.

Kendrick smiled. "None really. I'm here to ask a question."

"Ask it."

"I have one of the characters in my novel discover he has a brain tumor. I would like to check the symptoms with you."

"There are tumors and tumors," DeLong said. "It isn't that simple. What sort of symptoms do you have in mind?"

"Recurrent slight slurring of speech, weakness of the left facial muscles, the left hand, arm and leg."

DeLong nodded. "That would be consistent with a disturbance in the right frontal lobe area. How detailed do you wish to get?"

"I am not writing a medical treatise so I prefer not to use terminology unfamiliar to the layman. I simply want to put down something that is medically sound."

"You seem to have done that. I hope your character has an operation and recovers fully."

"No," Kendrick said. "It is necessary to the story that he die."

DeLong's eyes locked on his. "You wouldn't be conning me, would you, pretending that the symptoms belong to a character in a book while you yourself have experienced them?"

Kendrick smiled. "Nothing like that. You can take my word."

DeLong tilted his chair back and grinned. "In that case, you realize that I will have to charge you the going rate for an office visit for taking up my time? Are you sure you have no physical complaint I can treat to make it worthwhile?"

Kendrick tapped the glass top of the desk thoughtfully. "How are you on dreams?"

"Well, something like a tumor that can be diagnosed and excised is more in my field, but try me."

Kendrick told him about the dream.

DeLong reached for his pipe, filled it carefully and held a match to the bowl. Kendrick sensed the man was controlling some kind of inner excitement, succeeding except for the slight trembling of his hand.

"How long have you lived in that house?" DeLong asked.

"About three months."

"You bought it at a good price, I take it."

"Early nineteenth-century farmhouses are rare. I considered it a steal."

"And it never occurred to you to wonder why?"

"Should it have?"

DeLong leaned forward, the pipe forgotten. "You might have learned why none of the local people were interested. They feel there is something strange about that house."

Kendrick laughed. "I never considered you the type to tell jokes."

"No joke. People who do buy it never stay very long."

"What am I supposed to be dealing with?"

"That has never been clearly established."

"No ghostly apparitions in the middle of the night? No clanking of chains or moaning? No crockery flying about?"

"Nothing like that. As I understand it, it is more of a feeling, of a presence that makes people uncomfortable."

Kendrick waved a hand. "I've felt nothing. You've made a bad diagnosis."

"You've had the dream, which perhaps is worse." DeLong continued: "Ten years ago a man named Bailey, who lived in that house then, came to me much the same as you, for something completely unrelated, and in the course of the conversation he told me he was not sleeping well. I asked if there was any reason." DeLong tapped the pipe gently in the ash tray. "He described almost to a word the same dream that you just did."

Kendrick felt the smile leave his face. "That would seem impossible."

DeLong nodded. "Exactly."

"What happened to the man?"

DeLong hesitated. "He died. A neighbor stopped by one day and found that he had killed his wife and shot himself in the head. There was no apparent reason. They had always been considered a happily married couple—no friction between them at all. I never would have considered Bailey sick enough to do something like that. However, it happened. I am no psychiatrist and people do have problems that are secret from everyone. But it bothered me, particularly after the dream he had mentioned. There was something familiar about the incident. I couldn't place it for months and then it came to me."

"What came to you?"

DeLong left his chair and went to a large glass-doored bookcase along one wall, running his fingers down a row of volumes until he

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found a large leather-bound book that he brought back to his desk and placed in the pool of light from the lamp. The book was very old, the cover dark-brown, the pages yellowed.

"I collect things like this," he said. "I'm a history buff, especially on things that have happened in this valley. This is a journal kept by a Captain Crabtree of the Union Army during the Civil War. He commanded a squadron of cavalry assigned to protect this region from foraging Confederate forces. At that time, this was rich farming country." He turned the dry pages carefully. "The incident wasn't important enough to make the history books," he said, "but there was a skirmish not far from here in the spring of '63 between the Union unit and a Confederate cavalry. The Confederates lost because certain information they had expected to receive as to the disposition of the Federal force never reached them. The information was to have been provided by a spy."

"History is full of military mistakes," murmured Kendrick.

DeLong found the page he was looking for, cleared his throat and began to read. "Tuesday. It has been a long day and tomorrow promises to be even longer. Early this morning, I was awakened by a man who brought word that a rebel spy was believed to be in hiding at the farmhouse of the Widow Tarbot. I know the farm and the widow, an attractive woman whose husband was killed at Shiloh. I found it hard to believe that she would shelter a man like that willingly, believing that if he was there, he held her under duress, but it was a matter that had to be investigated. Accordingly, I aroused the sergeant and a trooper and proceeded at a rapid gallop to the house which was some five miles from our post. It was a bright spring morning, the sun not yet risen. As we approached the farmhouse, we observed a man, mounted on a black horse, leave the barnyard at a fast run. I shouted for him to stop but my voice seemed to spur him on. We pursued. As we crossed a field, I saw that he was headed for a stone wall that surrounded an orchard and I knew that if he leaped the wall and gained the grove, he would escape us among the trees. The thought did not occur to me alone. The trooper, a man accustomed to guns and a crack shot, reined in his horse, slid to the ground, steadied his pistol and fired. The man was hit just as the horse soared over the wall. He was knocked to the ground and lay stunned as we came up."

DeLong raised his eyes to Kendrick's. "Does this sound familiar?"



Kendrick closed his eyes. It had all come back as DeLong was reading: the galloping horse, the wind in his face, the shouts of the bluecoated cavalymen behind him and the pounding of the horse's hooves. It was his dream, described by a man more than a hundred years ago. He tried to control his voice. "There must be more."

DeLong nodded and dropped his eyes to the book. "I dismounted and examined him," he continued. "There was nothing we could do to save him. All that was possible was to make his last hours comfortable. Accordingly, as gently as we could, we placed him on one of the horses and took him to the Tarbot farmhouse.

"He was some years younger than myself, with long blond hair and a flowing moustache. A handsome, well-built fellow. The Widow Tarbot almost swooned when we brought him in and it was obvious that she had been quite taken with him. He clung to life tenaciously but, through it all, would give me no information whatsoever. I questioned the widow. He had appeared on her doorstep some three days ago, with the story that he was a pedlar who had lost his wagon and merchandise to a rebel raiding party. She had been attracted to him and he had taken advantage of it, moving into her home and bed. She had no idea he was a spy and indeed hadn't known he had risen early this morning with the intention of leaving. She was entirely innocent of anything except poor judgment and moral looseness and I so stated in my report.

"The man, however, was firmly convinced she had betrayed him and would not allow her in the room, an action which broke the poor woman's heart. Shortly before he died, he raised himself up on his elbows and in a voice so filled with hate and passion that I pray I will never again hear anything so blasphemous and bitter he cursed the house, women in general and the widow in particular. He swore his spirit would never leave the premises and that any woman who saw fit to live there would come to a horrible death."

DeLong closed the book carefully and leaned back. "There is more, but it is not pertinent."

Kendrick found he had clasped his hands in his lap tightly. He forced them to relax. "The house of the Widow Tarbot is my house?"

DeLong nodded.

"Are you implying that the spirit of this spy somehow has entered my subconscious?"

DeLong shrugged. "I am implying nothing. I'm a man of science but I'm also a country sawbones and have been around long enough to know there is no scientific explanation for everything that happens. I do not have the answer, any more than I do when a man I pronounce in perfect health dies the next day from a coronary, or one that I expect to die within six months is laughing at me three years later. However, I do know some parapsychology people at the university who are conducting experiments in dreams. I would like to put them in touch with you. They would be far more qualified to come up with an answer than I."

Kendrick lifted a hand. "No, thank you. I have no wish to be the subject of an experiment."

"I wish you would reconsider," DeLong said. "There is something here that should be investigated by competent people."

"The curse the spy supposedly laid on the women of that house. Did it come true?"

"I tried to track that down after I found the notation in the journal but this community has undergone radical changes since World War II. The farms were broken up, housing developments took over and many of the old-time residents died or moved away. Also, this town, like many small towns, once had a weekly newspaper before radio, television and the city papers with their fast distribution made it superfluous. It folded some years ago. At the time, I wanted the town council to microfilm all of the back copies but they wouldn't appropriate the money. I couldn't manage to go through them all before they were destroyed so I salvaged only some that I thought were of historical interest. None was appropriate in this case except for one that told of the death of Widow Tarbot. She was murdered shortly after the war ended, presumably by a discharged soldier. Many were passing through. I gathered from the tone of the story that the widow was no better than she should have been. Then, of course, there was Bailey."

"And since then?"

"No deaths, but I did tell you that several families moved out."

"So the spy's curse wasn't as effective as he would have hoped?"

"I wouldn't want to go on record as far as that is concerned."

"I can't believe you would take stock in something like that," said Kendrick, standing up. "There has to be a rational explanation for the dream. Something I read, or saw on television or in the movies. Even

this man who had the same nightmare ten years ago might have had it suggested to him the same way. To kill his wife and commit suicide, he must have thought he had good reason and I'm sure the dream had nothing to do with it."

He moved toward the door.

"How are things between you and your wife?" DeLong asked.

Kendrick stopped, his hand on the knob. He looked at the door, at the deep, lustrous grain of the walnut. "Fine," he said shortly.

DeLong leaned forward and placed his elbows on his desk. His voice was very soft. "I wish you had come here with a physical complaint. I could handle that. Something like this dream of yours is beyond me, but I have a feeling it is as serious in its own way as any physical disability you could have developed. I can't give you a prescription to cure it but I can give you some advice. Move out of that house as soon as possible."

Kendrick turned and tried to smile. "I always thought the first rule was never to frighten the patient."

"It is," DeLong said, "unless it is for the patient's good."

The late-afternoon sunshine outside was like another world. Sitting in that dim cave of an office and listening to DeLong, Kendrick had felt uncertainty and fear take hold, as if DeLong had told him he had developed an incurable disease, but here, in the bright light of day, it all sounded like nonsense, something the doctor had made up. Perhaps the man spent too much time among all those old books and records of his.

He pedaled his bike slowly along the country road.

Maybe DeLong is crazy.

Then again, maybe he was crazy, not DeLong. Maybe he had left his sanity somewhere along the trail of his dozen books where, for months at a time, he lived in a fantasy of his own making, inventing characters and dialogue, settings and plots for people who existed nowhere but in his own imagination. There were many times when these people were more real to him than those he met every day.

It is a matter of susceptibility, he thought, and I am more susceptible than most.

The afternoon was warm and he stopped at the crest of a long hill. The green valley spread out before him, the rolling country almost blue in the distance, shades of green and yellow marking fields here

and there. Below he could see his house, the whitewashed walls shining in the sun. It was very tranquil and it couldn't have been very much different than the morning the spy rode out.

To Kendrick's right, he noticed the remains of an old stone wall, deteriorated now and broken, and beyond it a scattering of ancient, gnarled trees that might once have been an orchard.

This was the place.

It was here that the spy had been shot and Kendrick knew with certainty exactly what the wall and orchard had looked like on that long-ago morning. He had been here in his dream. Here.

In spite of the warm sun and the perspiration, he felt cold. From somewhere between his shoulder blades an icy chill spread along with the fear he always experienced in the dream.

He knew then that he had run into something he would never understand and could not live with and there could be no help from anyone. DeLong was right. He must sell the house and move away rather than stay and be worn down by something he couldn't comprehend. He would go to New York with his manuscript tomorrow and when he returned, he and Nora would notify the real estate agent, pack and move.

He sped down the hill, anxious now to finish the manuscript so that he could deliver it in the morning.

He heard Nora come in an hour later and paused to wonder if he should tell her of the dream and his decision about the house but decided the dream would sound ridiculous and the surprise would have more impact if he waited until he returned from his trip. Kendrick smiled, sure that the move would eliminate the wall she had been building between them.

She came into his study late that night. "Are you still going to New York tomorrow?"

He nodded. "I would like you to drive me to the airport in the morning, if you don't mind. I wouldn't want to deprive you of the car while I'm gone."

She shrugged. "What time do you want to leave?"

"Eight," said Kendrick. "The plane takes off at nine."

"Will you be back tomorrow night?"

"No. I'll stay over and come back the following afternoon I'll call you from the airport to come and pick me up."

It was late the next day when Kendrick looked out of his publisher's office window at the crowded streets below, the swarming people suddenly reminding him that his wife was alone and isolated in that house and that if he only half-believed what DeLong implied, he never should have left her there. What little had to be done here could as easily have been done by phone or mail.

He fought a growing uneasiness. He reached for the phone, realized there was no rational explanation he could give her and that he had only one choice—to return on the first plane he could get. He wouldn't ask her to pick him up at the airport. It would be late and she disliked driving at night. He would take a cab.

The plane of the feeder airline that served the county deposited him at the small airfield at midnight and it took a substantial tip to persuade a cabdriver to drive him home.

Kendrick stood for a moment in the driveway after the cab had driven off, then hefted his traveling bag, walked up the driveway and let himself in quietly. He left his bag in the hallway and mounted the carpeted stairway to the second floor. Halfway, he paused.

The house was cold, too cold for such a warm night, and the air humid with a faint newly-turned-earth odor that permeated the stairwell. Kendrick felt a flicker of distaste. It was something he had never noticed about the house before.

He continued up the stairs, the chill and the odor mounting with each step, and suddenly Kendrick felt a touch of fear. For a moment he was on the verge of turning, of running out into the night where the air was fresh with the scent of honeysuckle, but he couldn't run. Whatever was waiting for him was *there* and he was drawn to it, moving forward as if he had an appointment he had to keep.

The bedroom door was open, enough light filtering into the room from the small hallway lamp they always left burning for Kendrick to see his wife curled up beneath the covers.

He stepped forward, then stopped, his heart clamped by a cold hand.

Alongside her was the figure of a man.

Kendrick retreated from the bedroom silently, his mind numb. He stood at the head of the stairs, too stunned to feel until a sense of outrage came to life and was fanned by the bitter almost-forgotten

memories of his mother and father and by the recent withdrawal of his wife. Something deep inside told Kendrick that there was only one way to punish a woman who had betrayed a man.

He went quickly down to his study, turning on the downstairs lights as he went. In his desk drawer he found a revolver he had bought long ago. He checked to see if it was loaded, held it in his hand awhile, then marched back upstairs, not caring if he was heard this time.

In the dim bedroom, he leveled the gun.

He shot each of them three times, dropped the revolver on the floor and went downstairs. In his study, he picked up the phone and dialed the police.

"You had better come out here," he said. "I have just killed two people." He gave his name and address, hung up and leaned back in his chair.

The entire house was now cold and damp, the odor of decay permeating, permeating . . .

The police came quickly, their harsh rapping on the door stirring Kendrick into motion. He slipped the latch and swung the door wide.

A tall thin man in a business suit, flanked by two uniformed patrolmen, said: "I'm Sheriff Perkins. You're Mr. Kendrick?"

Kendrick nodded and pointed dumbly toward the stairs.

Perkins and one of the patrolmen went up. Kendrick returned to the study and sat at his desk, propping his head in his hands. The second patrolman followed and leaned against the wall, watching him.

Kendrick closed his eyes and found his mind tightrope between reality and fantasy, the way it often did when he was writing. The dream, Captain Crabtree's journal, the spy, his wife in days long past, DeLong, Bailey, the Widow Tarbot—they flickered in and out of his mind and all the while he felt as if something was tugging at him, pursuing him as Death pursued him in the dream.

The dream—the shouts, the smell of leather, the hoofbeats, his spine crawling in anticipation of a bullet.

Kendrick became aware that others had entered the room. He looked up to see the sheriff—and DeLong, and he remembered dimly that the doctor had once told him he also served as county coroner.

Perkins took a card from his pocket and began to read aloud. Kendrick heard him only dimly.

DeLong leaned on the desk and put his face close to Kendrick's.

"Can you hear me?"

Kendrick nodded.

"He is reading you your rights. Do you understand what he is saying?"

DeLong's face swam, a little out of focus.

Not DeLong, thought Kendrick, Captain Crabtree. Not a tweed coat, a blue uniform. Say nothing, Kendrick told himself. It is one of the rules of war.

"You have to understand," said another face close to Kendrick's. "You told the man on the phone you killed two people. Is that correct?"

Kendrick focused on the face. "Yes," he said. "In the bedroom. There was a man with her."

"What kind of man?"

Kendrick felt a touch of irritation. "Look at him. See for yourself."

"We can't do that," said DeLong (Crabtree?). "There is only one body there, that of your wife. Do you understand? There is no man. There is no blood but your wife's. There is no sign a man ever was there."

A pain flared in Kendrick's head. "Betrayed," he muttered. "I was betrayed."

"Don't you understand? *There was no man!*"

Kendrick clenched his fists. The woman would pay. Lives would be lost now because of her. He could forgive for himself but not for the others.

Crabtree's (DeLong's?) face was still before him, the mouth moving but the voice indistinct.

Bluecoats, thought Kendrick. They talk too much. He felt himself slipping deeper into a gray pit, found some last inner reserve and fought, closing his eyes and willing himself to stay in touch with the room. When he opened his eyes again DeLong was before him, his eyes compassionate.

"We are trying to understand," he pleaded. "Why did you kill her?"

"There was a man," Kendrick said slowly and distinctly.

He was astride the coal-black horse again, charging madly up the hill toward the stone wall.

DeLong looked at Perkins and shook his head. "There is no point in

TO RIDE A BLACK HORSE

persisting. Nothing he says would be usable in court."

"There was no man," insisted Perkins.

DeLong raised both hands and gently massaged his eyelids as if that would make him see more clearly. "I believe there was," he said softly. "In Kendrick's mind, as real as if a man had actually been here, because there once was a spy and a curse and it all came together here tonight in a way that would mean nothing in a court of law."

Perkins stared at him. "What are you talking about?"

DeLong sighed. "I really don't know. All I do know is that a woman is dead and this man is in a never-never land, dreaming over and over of a race he knows he is going to lose and there is absolutely nothing we can do to save him."

"A race? What kind of race?"

"The race we all run," DeLong said. "With death."



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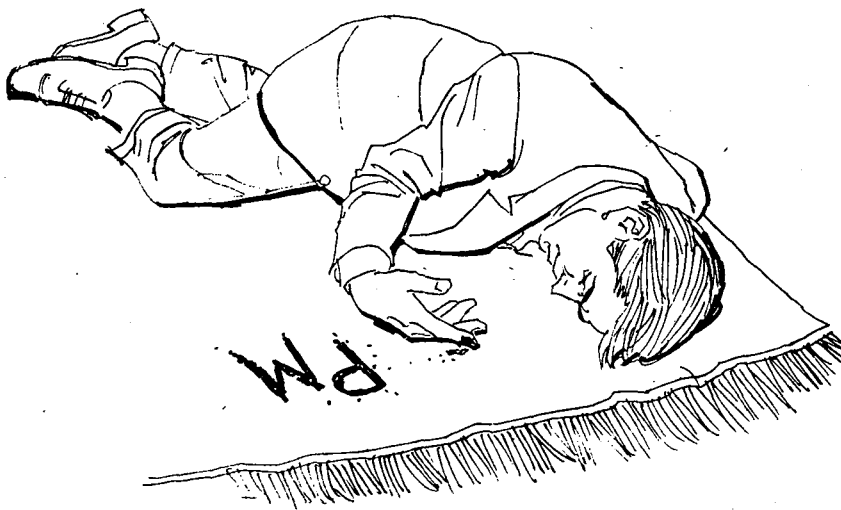
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*"Oh? But there must be oodles of P.M.s in the world . . ."*

# Finger Exercise

BY JACK RITCHIE



It was Sergeant Winiewski's case, but he was going on his vacation so Captain Wilberforce transferred it to Ralph and me.

He studied us for a while. "I still can't understand how the hell the two of you ever got the best record in homicide."

I smiled deprecatingly. "We miss a few here and there, sir."

Wilberforce grunted. "Before Edward Weaver died, he used his own blood to scrawl the initials of his murderer on the rug."

Ralph frowned thoughtfully. "Why didn't he use a pen or a pencil?"

"I don't know," Wilberforce said. "I suppose at a time like that some victims have the tendency to panic and forget the logical thing to do."

I nodded. "What makes us so certain that the initials are those of Weaver's murderer?"

"Why else would he be writing bloody initials at a time like that?" Wilberforce puffed his cigar. "The initials are P.M., but we can't seem to tie them to anybody connected with the case."

I savored the letters. "P.M.? Post Meridian? Prime Minister? Provost Marshall? Para-mutual? Pontifex Maximus?" I shook my head.

Wilberforce continued. "The murder took place some time between eight and ten-thirty last night. No one seems to have heard the shot, but that was probably because those small-caliber weapons don't make much noise. It was either a .22 or a .25. We didn't find the gun and we haven't got the ballistics or coroner's reports yet. And besides, Weaver had a stack of classical records running on his stereo. For all we know, he could have got clobbered during the *Hallelujah Chorus*."

Ralph brightened. "The *Hallelujah Chorus* is one of my favorites, but I can never remember the words."

Wilberforce worked a few more puffs out of his cigar. "Weaver entered his study at eight o'clock. Across the hall, in the drawing room, his wife Bertha, her two grown children, Irving and Diana, and Hiram Basswood, a lawyer and friend of the family, played bridge from eight until approximately ten-thirty. They had a clear view of the study door. No one entered or left the study during that time. When they broke up the game at ten-thirty, Basswood knocked on the study door and entered to tell Weaver that he was leaving. He found the body and the initials. It looks like whoever shot Weaver got into the study through the French windows leading to the terrace. He might even have been let in by Weaver himself."

I pondered the steeple I'd made with my fingertips. "Couldn't one of the people playing bridge—while he or she was dummy, for instance—have run outside the house, gained admittance to the study via the French windows, shot Weaver, and then rejoined the players with no one the wiser?"

"Possibly," Wilberforce said encouragingly. "But what about the initials P.M.? They must mean something, but they don't seem to apply to any of the bridge players."

When Captain Wilberforce finished briefing us, Ralph and I went to our car and drove to Hiram Basswood's law office downtown.

Basswood, a short trim-bearded man who reminded me of General Grant, led us into his private office and closed the door.

"We have just been assigned to this case," I said. "Tell us exactly what happened last night."

He shrugged. "Nothing much to tell. Bertha, Diana, Irving and I played bridge from about eight until ten-thirty, when we broke up the game. I went to the study to tell Edward I was leaving and there he was, lying on the floor dead."

"And the initials?" I asked. "P.M.? Do they mean anything to you?"

Basswood shook his head. "All I can think of is Pasquale Mancini. He was an Italian statesman and jurist who died in 1888, so I suppose that gives him a solid alibi. I did a paper on him in college."

"Edward Weaver didn't play bridge?" I asked.

"No. He didn't care for cards of any kind. He just disappeared into his study, as he usually does when we play, to work or read or do whatever people do in studies these days."

"Was the study door open or closed?"

"Closed."

"Did you or anyone touch the body or anything else in the room?"

"Absolutely nothing. It was obvious to all of us that Edward was beyond resuscitation."

"You are a friend of the family?"

Basswood nodded. "I've known Edward and Bertha all my life. This was Bertha's second marriage, you know. Her first husband died five years ago."

"Did anyone of you leave the bridge table at any time last evening?" I asked.

"I suppose so." Basswood rubbed his beard. "Obviously Edward was murdered by this P.M. person. He must have gained entrance through the French windows, shot Edward, and then fled."

Ralph nodded. "How did Mrs. Weaver's first husband die?"

"He was killed by a hit-and-run driver. The police never did find him."

When Ralph and I were through with Basswood, we drove on to the Weaver residence north of the city on the Lake Shore Drive. The gravel driveway wound through two acres of trees and ended in a circle

before a large French Provincial house. A female servant answered the door and led us through the house to the garden.

Mrs. Bertha Weaver wore a broad-brimmed straw hat. She smiled "You're detectives? Whatever happened to that nice Sergeant Wisniewski?"

"He's on vacation," Ralph said. "He wanted to be in Door County when the cherry blossoms bloomed."

Bertha Weaver was a striking woman in her forties. A small garden cart beside her was nearly filled with cut flowers.

"I'm making a wreath for Edward's funeral," she said. "I suppose I could buy one, but I like the personal touch. I'm not quite sure how to go about it though. The library has absolutely nothing on the subject of funeral wreaths."

"How large an estate did your husband leave?" I asked.

"Two or three million dollars. I don't have a head for figures."

"And who are the beneficiaries?" I asked.

"Edward left it all in percentages. I receive fifty percent, Irving and Diana twenty each. And Hiram ten."

Ralph turned to Bertha Weaver. "Does the name Pasquale Mancini mean anything to you?"

She shook her head. "No. But now I remember something about the initials P.M. Paula Marquand. She was Edward's secretary, but she quit her job a couple of months before I married Edward. She claimed she could type over eighty words a minute. I'd say it was nearer forty, though Edward didn't seem to care."

"Paula Marquand?" I said briskly. "We'll put out an All Points Bulletin immediately."

"Henry," Ralph said, "why don't we try the phone book first?"

Paula Marquand's address proved to be 167 N. Park, a four-story apartment building. As we entered the foyer, a tall man sporting a white ten-gallon hat and cowboy boots passed us on his way out.

We took the elevator up, pressed the buzzer at door 311 and waited.

"If she's a working girl," Ralph said, "she's probably not home."

The door opened on its chain. "Who are you?"

Ralph and I showed our identification. "We'd like to ask you a few questions," I said.

"About what?"

"About the death of Edward Weaver."

"Oh?" she said. "Eddie's dead? How come?"

"He was murdered," Ralph said. "But before he died, he managed to . . ."

"Ralph," I said firmly, "we'll get to that."

She unfastened the chain and let us inside. Paula Marquand was tall, grey-eyed and wore a long dressing gown. "When did it happen?" she asked.

"Edward Weaver was killed sometime between eight-thirty and ten o'clock last night," I said. "How long did you work for Edward Weaver?"

"About a year."

"And you quit two months before Edward Weaver married the present Mrs. Weaver?"

She stifled a yawn. "I got a better job offer."

"Miss Marquand," Ralph said sternly, "before Edward Weaver died, he scrawled the initials P.M. on the rug in his own life blood."

She raised an eyebrow. "Oh? But there must be *oodles* of P.M.s in the world." She smiled sweetly. "You'll never send me to the chair on that kind of evidence."

"We don't have capital punishment in this state," Ralph said. "Of course some states still sentence people to death, but nowadays that's just an emotional outlet for outraged citizens. Actually, the chances of anyone going to the chair anymore are practically . . ."

"Miss Marquand," I said, "were you *fond* of Edward Weaver? Did you have expectations?"

"Expectations? You mean was I trying to hook him? Sure. I was working on it. After all, a man with that kind of money doesn't float onto the scene every day. But I guess I played it too slow and coy or he just preferred the mature type. When this Bertha What's-her-name came along, I could see the handwriting on the wall."

"Ah," I said, "so you *were* the woman scorned? You *were* wounded and bitter when he married Bertha What's-her-name?"

Ralph pursued the point. "Wounded and bitter enough to kill?"

"If I was, why would I wait two years to kill him?"

"You could be a slow burner," Ralph said. "Do you have any Norwegian blood?"

"Miss Marquand," I said, "can you account for your time between eight and ten-thirty last night?"

"I thought you'd never ask. Last night my boss took me to the

Highway Builders' banquet in Madison. And Madison is at least seventy-five miles from here."

Ralph eyed her skeptically. "Can you prove that? I mean about being at the banquet, not the mileage to Madison."

She sighed. "Look, my boss is president of the organization this year. He and I sat on a raised platform with the other officers and their wives or whoever. Dinner was served at seven-thirty, the speeches began at eight-thirty and the meeting didn't adjourn until after ten. I didn't leave the platform even to powder my nose. Over two hundred guests could testify to that. I can even give you a membership list if you want it."

"Who is your boss?" Ralph asked.

"Tex Kastenmeister of Kastenmeister Construction. Tex was born and raised in Sheboygan, but he has this thing about cowboy boots and hats. He even wears them . . ." She stifled a yawn. "Oh, you'll have to pardon me, I've been having trouble getting enough sleep lately."

Ralph nodded sympathetically. "This is your day off?"

"You might say that."

When we got back to our car, I said, "For my money, one of those four bridge players killed Weaver."

"Then why did Weaver go through all that trouble making the initials P.M.?"

"We've been looking only for the obvious P.M.s. Weaver could have been referring to a nickname or something of that nature."

We returned to the Weaver residence and this time found Bertha Weaver in the drawing room amid heaps of cut flowers. The small violet-eyed girl with her proved to be Diana Weaver.

They were engaged in the process of unravelling wire coat hangers. "Personally, Mother," Diana said, "I don't think this is going to work. The wire keeps breaking."

"Mrs. Weaver," I said, "I understand that your first husband died in a hit-and-run accident."

"Yes," she said. "Three years ago. In June, I believe."

"No, Mother," Diana said, "it was August. I remember because it happened the week after I got my driver's license."

Bertha Weaver smiled at her daughter fondly. "Diana's been elected chairperson of her Women's Lib Action Group. She's even written a fight song entitled, 'I Am Person'."

Ralph cleared his throat. "Actually, the word 'person' is itself chauvinistic. I mean, it comes in two parts, 'per' and 'son', and 'son' is obviously male."

Diana frowned. "I never realized that. The whole word is condescending and probably degrading. Why do we have to take male words and put prefixes on them, like *woman* and *female*? Can't we have root words of our very own?"

Ralph nodded. "My wife says that before true equality in the matter of sexes can be attained, whole languages will have to be overhauled and genders thrown out. After all, what justification is there for making a table masculine and a chair feminine?"

"Mrs. Weaver," I said, "how long have you known Hiram Basswood?"

"Practically all my life. I first met him in dancing school. You wouldn't believe it today, but his version of the Big Apple brought down the house at one of Miss Plimsol's semi-annual recitals."

"Hiram's quite fond of you," Diana said. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if your next . . ."

Bertha Weaver blushed. "Let's not talk about that now, Diana. At least not until the wreath is finished."

"Where can I find your son Irving?" I asked.

"He's upstairs in his room working on his master's thesis," Diana said. "It's on the latent heterosexuality of Oscar Wilde."

Ralph and I followed her directions and found Irving before a portable typewriter, staring at a blank sheet of paper and eating potato chips.

Ralph and I showed him our identification. He stared at mine. "Henry Turnbuckle?"

I nodded proudly. "A name as old as hardware."

Irving was well over six and a half feet tall, but probably weighed less than one hundred and fifty pounds. He offered us potato chips. "These come in a tubular container. Compared to them, other chips just don't stack up."

I thought they tasted a bit bland. "Does anyone in this household have any nicknames, terms of endearment or whatever?"

Irving gave it thought. "I understand that my mother called me Dindin until I was almost five years old. Or was it the dog? I don't really remember."

"By the way," I said cleverly, "your surname isn't really Weaver, is it?"

"No. My father's last name was Carson."

I frowned thoughtfully. "And what was your mother's *maiden* name?"

"Swandon." He wiped his fingers on a piece of typing paper. "Sorry I can't come up with anything helpful, but P.M. just doesn't seem to apply to any one of us."

"My mother called me Bootie," Ralph said.

I blinked. "Why?"

"Because I swallowed one of them. Luckily it passed through."

A maid appeared at the door. "There is a Captain Wilberforce on the phone and he would like to speak to a Sergeant Turnbuckle."

She led Ralph and me to an extension in the next room, where I picked up the receiver. "Henry," Captain Wilberforce said, "ballistics says that the murder weapon was caliber .25. But more important is the coroner's report. Edward Weaver couldn't possibly have scrawled those initials on the rug."

"Why not?"

"The coroner is absolutely certain that Weaver died instantly."

When I hung up, I conveyed the information to Ralph.

He frowned. "Then who *did* make those letters? And why?"

"The 'why' is simple. To throw us off the track."

Ralph sighed. "I'd hate to think that one of those four suspects killed Edward Weaver. They all seem like pretty nice people. Level-headed."

"It has to be one of them," I said. "Who else is there?"

"Why couldn't it have been some stranger? An intruder? A burglar?"

"Ralph," I said. "You're trying to take the easy way out. Do you realize how many murders have gone unsolved because some naive detective preferred to blame an intruder?"

"How many?" Ralph asked.

"I don't have the figures with me at the moment. But it is impressive. Besides, would a burglar break into a lighted room that has a person inside it? Anyway, nothing was reported missing."

"Couldn't the burglar have broken into the house earlier in the evening and hidden himself in the study behind something or other? He was going to burglarize the house when everybody was asleep. But



Weaver accidentally discovered his hiding place, and the intruder shot Weaver and fled into the night."

"Ralph," I said, "before this burglar fled into the night, why did he stop and scrawl the initials P.M. on the rug?"

Ralph sighed and we returned to Irving's room.

I studied him. "What were you wearing last night?"

He thought about it. "I had on a knit T-shirt and slacks."

"Are you wearing them now?"

"Well, not the T-shirt, as you can see. But the same slacks, yes."

I smiled. "Last night one of you four bridge players left the game, sneaked outside, entered the study, and shot Edward Weaver."

Irving listened politely.

"And this same person, this same murderer, scrawled the initials P.M. on the rug in order to throw suspicion not only from himself, but from anyone else in the household. The letters P.M. in themselves mean nothing." I smiled again "But beyond that, what do we have?"

"I don't know," Ralph said. "What do we have?"

"We have a murderer with blood on his finger or fingers."

Irving and Ralph examined their fingers.

I continued. "And when a murderer has blood on his finger or fingers, what must he do about that blood?"

Ralph came up with the answer immediately. "He has to wipe that blood off. Right? So he picked up a piece of scrap paper, wiped his finger or fingers, and threw the paper into the wastebasket. I'll go down to the study and look for it."

"Never mind, Ralph," I said. "If the murderer discarded the paper in the study, I am certain it would have been found by our technicians. No, Ralph, the murderer *did* use something to wipe the blood from his fingers, but he did not leave that something at the scene of the crime. After all, if we found it, we would certainly deduce that someone besides Weaver made those initials. A dying man may conceivably scrawl those initials on the rug, but he would hardly be so neat as to wipe his fingers and toss the paper into the wastebasket. Besides, Weaver's fingers had already been dipped into his own blood as part of this vile plot and had to remain in that sanguine condition.

"No, Ralph, the murderer wiped his fingers on something—either a piece of paper or a handkerchief—and put that something into his pocket—or purse—and disposed of it later."

Ralph mulled that over. "But if he got rid of it, what good does it do for us to know about it now?"

I turned to Irving. "Will you please turn your pockets inside out?"

Irving shrugged and emptied the contents of his pockets on his desk.

Ralph examined them. "I don't see anything suspicious."

"There's no handkerchief, Ralph," I said.

Irving scratched his chin. "I simply forgot to put one in my pocket. It happens all the time."

"Ralph," I said, "if one puts a bloody handkerchief—or the equivalent—into one's pocket, the chances are exceedingly good that the *inside* of that pocket will become stained with blood." I pointed to Irving's everted right hand pocket. "I see stains there, Irving. Do you suppose they are blood?"

He looked down quickly. "Catsup stains. Yesterday at lunch I picked up one of those free-flowing bottles of catsup by mistake and got it all over. I used my handkerchief to wipe my fingers and threw it away after I left the restaurant."

I regarded him with grim relentlessness. "Our laboratory will soon determine whether that is catsup or blood, sir. Also we will delve under your fingernails. No doubt some traces of that 'catsup' still remain. Do you persist in denying that there is human blood on your pocket lining?"

Irving slowly munched several potato chips while he thought.

I pressed on. "You created those initials to throw the police off the track. Any special reason for using the letters P.M.?"

He finally sighed. "Because I didn't want to get anybody I knew into trouble and I didn't know anybody who had the initials P.M."

"Then you admit murdering your stepfather?"

Irving massaged his neck. "I refuse to say anything more until I've seen a lawyer."

"Ah ha," I said. "Ralph, read him his rights."

That done, we ushered Irving downstairs, where we found Mrs. Weaver and Diana still at work. Hiram Basswood had evidently just joined them.

They stared at us while I explained why I was taking Irving to headquarters.

Bertha Weaver turned to Hiram Basswood. "Hiram, do you deal in criminal law?"

Hiram drew himself up. "Irving won't need a lawyer. I am responsible for those initials beside the corpse. Only the initials I made were F.M. Why did you close the prongs of my F, Irving?"

Irving colored a bit. "Because there's this girl. Freda McCarthy. An undergraduate. Center of the university's girls' basketball team. Nice eyes. Terrific personality. Six foot three. We've had a couple of dates and we find that we have a lot in common. I've heard how thorough the police can be and I thought that eventually the F.M. might somehow incriminate her. So I changed the F to a P."

I regarded Hiram Basswood skeptically. "Just one moment, sir. Are you wearing the same suit you were wearing last night at the time of the murder?"

He looked down at his trousers. "Yes. Why?"

"Then let me see the bloodstains on the lining of your pocket, sir."

He raised an eyebrow. "Why should I have bloodstains on my pocket lining?"

I smiled. "If you truly created these alleged initials F.M., then *how* did you get rid of the blood on your fingers?"

"There's a goldfish bowl in the study. I just swished my hand back and forth a few times until I washed off the blood."

"Very well," I said stiffly. "So you murdered Edward Weaver and then created the initials as a diversion?"

Basswood's eyes went from Bertha, to Irving, to Diana. "Edward was already dead when I entered the study."

"Ah," I said, "and you immediately realized that one of the people at the bridge table had to have committed the crime, and in an effort to protect that murderer or murderess, you quickly scrawled those initials with Weaver's own blood."

Bertha Weaver smiled. "How sweet of you trying to protect us, Hiram." Her eyes became thoughtful. "The more I think about it, the more I realize that *none* of us left that bridge table during the entire evening. Isn't that absolutely right, children?" Irving quickly agreed and Diana nodded. "Not a single one of us left the table. And that includes Hiram."

"Ha," I said scornfully, "then why did Hiram Basswood think that he had to scrawl those initials, if all of you had perfect alibis?" I regarded them sternly. "I would advise all of you to think your words over carefully. We on the police force have our ways of getting inexorably to the

naked truth and when we do there will be hell to pay and three indictments for obstruction of justice."

The phone rang and Bertha Weaver picked it up. She listened for a moment. "It's for you, Sergeant Turnbuckle."

I decided to take the call in the study and Ralph followed me.

I removed the extension from its cradle. "Turnbuckle here."

"How are you doing, Henry?" Captain Wilberforce asked.

I smiled. "I am confident that I will wrap up this case in a matter of hours."

"That's nice, Henry," Wilberforce said. "But I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry. Last night one of our cars picked up a drunk. The boys would have put him in a taxi and sent him home but they found he was carrying a gun. So they brought him in and we ran a make. His name is Opie Bronson and he has a long record of breaking and entering. We ran a test on the gun, a .25. Guess what we found?"

I closed my eyes and waited.

"It turns out that the bullet that killed Edward Weaver came out of Opie's gun. We talked to Opie about it and maybe the hangover helped, but he decided to confess. He broke into the Weaver place and hid in the study with the intention of burglarizing the house when everybody was asleep. Weaver stumbled across him and Opie panicked. He shot Weaver and got the hell out of there. Opie was drinking to forget what he did."

I hung up, went to the French windows, and stared out at the terrace. The damned intruder probably fled through this very window.

"What did the captain say?" Ralph asked.

"Ralph," I said, "how many homicides have you and I solved?"

"Twenty-seven."

"How many have we failed to solve?"

"Four."

"And how many were wolved for us?"

"Five."

"No, Ralph, it is now six."

Ralph rummaged through the liquor cabinet until he found a bottle of sherry.

I downed three stiff fingers, squared my shoulders, and marched into the drawing room to tell the suspects that I would no longer be needing them.

"I'm looking for two girls. I've got to find them . . ."

# Looking for Milliken Street

by Joyce  
Harrington



Caroline picked up the telephone.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Can you talk to me?"

"Who is this?"

"Can you help me?"

Caroline tried to place the voice. It sounded very young. "What's the matter?" she asked.

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"What's your name?" the voice asked in return.

"Caroline Anderson. Are you in trouble?"

"That's a pretty name. Where's your little girl?"

"I haven't got a little girl." Not yet.

"I have a sister. She's littler than me. She's a cry-face. I hit her and she fell down the stairs and now she's crying and we have to eat lunch and go back to school."

"Where's your mother?" Caroline asked, beginning to be alarmed.

"Working. If Michele doesn't get up pretty soon and stop crying I'm going to hit her again. She makes me sick."

"Wait a minute. Maybe Michele is hurt. Isn't there any neighbor you can call? Where do you live?"

"Oh, I have to go now—the soup's spilling all over the stove!"

Caroline returned to her own lunch, leftover macaroni and cheese, reheated and grown cold again. What an odd phone call; she'd heard of people getting obscene calls and nuisance calls, but this was something different. This was a child in trouble. Two children in trouble, from the sound of it. Caroline stared at the congealed mess on her plate, wishing there were something she could do, some way she could reach them. She rose heavily from the table and scraped her unappetizing lunch into the disposal. Criminal, she brooded, the way some people leave their children alone. She looked down down at her swelling stomach. Never, never in a million years will I ever leave you alone like that.

Over the rush of water in the sink and the slurping grind of the disposal, the telephone burred. Caroline ran clumsily, hands dripping, to snatch it up.

"Yes?"

"Is that you?" The same voice, but this time whispering.

"This is Mrs. Anderson." Play it cool, Caroline told herself. No pressure. Maybe she could find out who the child was—and where she lived.

"Michele is o.k. now."

"That's good. How about you?"

"I'm o.k. Michele is mad at me. I made her wash her face and she threw the towel in the toilet and it went down and the water's all over the floor and Mommy's gonna be mad at me." The whispering young voice seemed on the edge of tears. Be firm, Caroline warned herself.

Be matter-of-fact. Get the situation under control and then try to find out who this poor kid is.

"Now listen. Don't flush the toilet anymore. Got that?"

"Yes."

"Then mop up the water. Use a mop or some old rags."

"Michele did it. Michele should mop it up."

"Both of you mop it up. Then wash your hands."

"I'll mop it up with Mommy's tablecloth. I'll mop it up with Daddy's underwear. I'll mop it up with Michele's new dress and her Chatty Cathy and her tricycle and her pillow and her snuggle bear and—" The voice was loud now, punctuated with giggles and excited, vengeful breathing.

"Hold on. What's your name?"

"Emily."

"What's your last name, Emily?"

"Not gonna tell."

"Well, I told you *my* last name. How can we be friends if you won't tell me yours?"

"I'll tell you, but I'm not sure which one is right."

"What do you mean?"

"Sometimes it's Cranford and sometimes it's Frank."

"Which one is it now?"

"I don't know." A wail. "My daddy went away and then my mommy got a new daddy and we came to live here and then he went away too."

"All right, Emily. It doesn't matter. Either one is fine. Now tell me where you live. If it's not too far I can come over and help you."

"I don't know." A silence in which Caroline thought, Good grief, what have I gotten myself into? This kind of trouble I don't need. The reedy voice continued. "I can't tell the name of the street. It's a hard name and I can't say it. It sounds like 'Moocow.'"

"All right. Never mind that for now. What's Michele doing?"

"Oh, she's eating her soup. She eats like a pig." The voice drifted away from the phone, chanting, "Pig, pig, piggy piggy pig." An enraged cry and a clatter followed, and then Emily was back on the line.

"She's an awful cry-face. And she threw her spoon at me."

Caroline decided to try one more time to find out where this little scene was being played. Emily sounded like a little bully, but she

probably had too much responsibility for a child her age.

"Emily, how old are you?"

"Seven and a half. Michele's five, but boy is she dumb. She can't even tie her shoes."

"You sound like a pretty big girl for seven and a half. Where does your mommy work?"

"In a store. She says it's a big store. She bought Michele's Chatty Cathy from there, but she didn't bring me anything."

Try another tack. "What's your phone number, Emily?"

"What time is it? We have to go back to school when the little hand is near the one and the big hand is on the nine."

"It's twenty to one now. You have five minutes. You'd better get ready."

"O.k. Can I call you tomorrow?"

"Well, all right. But I may be out." The obvious question flared in Caroline's mind. "Emily, where did you get my phone number?"

"It's a pretty number. Goodbye."

"Emily, be sure and tell your mother about the towel in the toilet." Caroline realized she was talking to a dead phone and hung up. She gazed at the number on the face of the dial. What was there about it that would seem pretty to a child? It was just a group of numbers, neither pretty nor ugly, whose sole function was to cause this particular telephone out of millions to ring and bring Caroline Anderson running to answer it.

"The area code! Oh, dear!" Caroline had assumed that Emily and Michele were squabbling and slopping soup somewhere in the city. Now she was staggered by the realization that they could be calling anywhere from Alaska to Florida. How could she hope to find them?

Why should she *want* to find them? In no way were they her responsibility. She'd done the best she could to help them—and if she did find them, what could she do? Would their mother welcome a meddling stranger telling her she shouldn't leave two little girls alone? The questions rose one after another. Why didn't they take their lunch to school? What school did they attend? Surely Emily would have told her that if she'd thought to ask. Where did they go after school? Who looked after them then? Questions. Questions that increased her uneasiness about the two girls and provided an answer of sorts to the overriding question of why she should want to find them. She'd seen too



many of them, the Emilys and the Micheles, the Tommys and the Marks, in her work as a remedial reading teacher. Key children with old eyes in tiny pinched faces, their house keys slung on grimy bits of string around their necks, their minds and bodies irretrievably undernourished. She had wanted to save them all, to fill them with good food and the joy of learning, and with the cherishing that so many of them seemed to lack.

"Caroline Anderson, you are a dope," she announced to the sunny afternoon. "You miss your job and you're a sucker for a sob story."

As she trundled her cumbersome body through the afternoon's chores, she thought back over the eight years she'd spent in the city's schools. Eight years of small victories and enormous frustrations. Eight years of precious equipment destroyed by vandalism, of even more precious ideas blocked by rigid school-board bureaucracy, and through it all the saving reward of witnessing the dawn of comprehension in young eyes; the satisfaction of guiding at least one child out of twenty to the notion that reading was not only necessary but could be fun.

Eight years, too, of Ted urging her to quit when the disappointments became too great and she would come home from school drained and exhausted, full of bitterness against a system that could be so immune to the needs of the young lives entrusted to its care. Still she had hung on, certain that on the next day or the next some small breakthrough would make it all worthwhile. Eight years of promising Ted that the instant she became pregnant she would give it all up and happily stay home and lavish on her own child the concern and love she'd tried to dole out to the hundreds of children who'd passed through her reading lab. Had she been a dedicated teacher, or simply a young woman with a strong mothering instinct and a love of reading that she tried to foist onto the unwilling minds that came within her scope?

Well, whatever, it was all in the past now. In two more months all that mothering instinct would have a definite object. Caroline complacently laid her two hands on the high mound of her stomach and immediately felt the inner shifting that was one of the pleasures of pregnancy. No, this child would never need to call strangers on the telephone. Not if she could help it.

"It could be a joke. Just a bad practical joke."

"Oh, Ted. You wouldn't say that if you'd heard her. Anyway, I don't think children that young are capable of complicated telephone jokes."

Caroline dawdled over her ice cream and coffee. Ted had finished his, and she knew he was eager to relax into his comfortable chair with the evening paper.

"If it bothers you, you should report it to the phone company. I don't want you getting upset over some kid who uses the phone as a baby-sitter."

"I'm not upset. Just concerned. And what could the phone company do? Millie Bernstein had a breather once. He used to call her every night and just breathe into the phone. She reported it, and all the phone company told her was to hang up on him and suggested that she get an unlisted number."

"Do you want to get an unlisted number?"

"No, Ted, that's not the point. The point is that there are two little girls somewhere who are being left alone every day. Neglected. And I'm the only one who knows it."

Ted crumpled his paper napkin and came around the table. He stood behind her and gently massaged her shoulders. "Don't flatter yourself. You're not the only one who knows it. Their mother knows. Their father probably knows. They have neighbors and they go to school. Somebody knows. You don't have to do anything about it."

"I guess you're right." Caroline sighed and laid her cheek on the hand that tenderly pressed the stiffness and worry out of her tense shoulders. "Still, the whole world could know about it and not *do* anything. Oh, Ted, it seems so cruel and unfair."

"Do you know what's really cruel and unfair? You haven't asked me yet how things went at the office today. You're neglecting your one and only husband. I guess I'll just have to start calling beautiful blonde phone numbers to get the sympathy and understanding that's lacking in my home."

"Ted, you idiot. How *did* things go at the office today?" Caroline struggled out of her chair and began clearing the table.

"Fine. Just fine. We clipped two poodles, spayed three cats, gave twelve rabies injections, saw one hip displacement, two cases of ear mites, set a broken leg and the star boarder is back again. I don't know why that woman keeps a dog. He spends more time with us than he does at home."

"Would you say he was neglected?"

Ted laughed and followed her into the kitchen with the coffee cups. "Point taken. But at least she sees that her precious Baron is well taken care of. She doesn't go off and leave him to fend for himself."

The next morning Caroline devoted to working on the nursery. It was a tiny room next to their bedroom, not much bigger than a walk-in closet. It had been freshly painted and the new crib installed. There was just enough room left for a chest of drawers and a small flat-topped dressing table. The chest was one they'd had for years, crammed full of the odds and ends of their life together—photographs, souvenirs of vacation trips, Ted's baby book faithfully kept up by his mother until he was five or six and passed on to Caroline early in their marriage in the glowing hope that she would soon be keeping one herself.

They hadn't wanted a child right away, not while Ted was still working for his D.V.M. And Caroline was teaching. Then, when Ted had gone into partnership with old Dr. Crouch and they'd decided it was time to start a family, nothing had happened. Eight years of waiting and hoping, of medical tests that showed no reason for infertility, of repeated advice to be patient and keep trying. Until last spring. Caroline, leafing through the mementos of those eight years of waiting and being patient, remembered the excitement of that windy March afternoon when the obstetrician had confirmed what she was almost afraid to believe and gave her a sample package of vitamin pills. She and Ted had celebrated that evening and she'd downed the first of the pills with a glass of champagne, solemnly toasting the event. This had to be the most wanted baby ever conceived. Only two more months to go.

Caroline sorted the contents of the drawers. At the back of one of them, she found a street map of the city.

"So that's where that's been hiding."

With an hour before she was due at the doctor's office for her check-up, Caroline unfolded the street map on top of the chest of drawers.

"Moocow Street," she murmured. "Moocow Avenue. Moocow Lane."

She scanned the configuration of the city, found their own street and Ted's animal clinic half a mile away. No Moocow Street. Her eyes drifted to the bottom of the map where the streets were listed alphabetically with their location guides. Her finger traveled down the list of M's.

“M-M-M-MacKenzie. Madison. Malkover Lane. Markham? Mascoulie Drive?”

She carried the map to the kitchen table and settled down with pencil and paper. She'd make a list of possible Moocows. Not that she would ever do anything with it, but maybe if Emily called again she would recognize a street name that sounded like “Moocow.”

Caroline soon had a list that ranged from MacKenzie to Murchison and a fair idea where each was located. Fifteen streets, a couple in suburban areas, one downtown thoroughfare that was obviously out, the rest scattered throughout the city's residential areas, some familiar, others that she knew only by reputation, and still others about which she knew nothing at all.

Time to go.

The doctor's office was crowded. The nurse announced that he'd had an early morning delivery and there would be a slight delay. The waiting ladies smiled at each other in patient complicity and settled down with magazines and quiet chat. Caroline had brought along a romantic paperback, trivial and undemanding. Just as her body fidgeted under the weight she carried, so her mind veered away from heavy reading.

At last her turn came. After the usual weighing in, the palpating of her protuberant stomach, listening to the fetal heartbeat, the repeated caution not to gain too much weight, the calm reassurance that all was well and the suggestion that it might be wise to pack her hospital case and keep it ready, Caroline hurried home.

It was one-thirty by the time she reached the apartment. Too late for phone calls from Emily. The girls were probably safely back in school. She made some lunch and ate it from a tray in the livingroom, her feet propped up on a hassock, the final chapter of her novel for companionship. When youth, beauty and virtue finally triumphed at the last possible moment, Caroline yawned. She would take a little nap, and after that she would begin repainting the chest of drawers for the nursery.

The bedside telephone jolted her out of a dream in which her baby, her own little girl, was crying somewhere in the apartment, but although Caroline scoured all the rooms, rummaged in all the drawers and closets, even looked inside the dishwasher, she couldn't find the crying infant. As she rose muzzily out of sleep, she realized that the crying in her dream was the sound of the telephone. She glanced at

the alarm clock on Ted's night stand and saw that it was almost three-thirty.

"Hello?"

"I called and I called but you weren't there," the voice accused.

"Emily?" Still groggy from sleep and from the awful anxiety of her dream, Caroline felt a wave of guilt at the accusation.

"Where were you? You said I could call again today."

"I had to go to. . ." Caroline caught herself just in time. She was simply not going to explain herself to this demanding child. "I was out. I told you I might not be here."

"Guess what? Michele ran away."

Caroline heard the smug, self-satisfied tone of the announcement, but ignored it in her panicky concern.

"Emily! Did you tell anyone else? Someone should be out looking for her! The police. . ."

"Oh, she's o.k. She came back after school. I told her I was gonna make her eat monkey meat for lunch, so she ran away and hid. Isn't she dumb?"

"Oh, Emily, that was a terrible thing to do." Caroline was uncertain whether the terrible thing was the tormenting of Michele or the ease with which Emily evoked her own fears. "Are you sure she's all right?"

"Sure. Do you want to talk to her? I'll get her." Caroline heard Emily's voice shrieking away from the phone. "Hey, Michele. Come here. The lady wants to talk to you. Come on, or I'll kick you."

Caroline waited, listening to the scuffles and cries at the other end of the line. "Why don't I just hang up?" she asked herself. "Because she'll just call back again. Besides, there's something so wrong going on there, I've got to find out who they are and where they live."

Presently another voice came over the wire, younger-sounding and lisping. "Lo."

"Michele?"

"Emily's bad. I hate her."

"Michele, listen to me. What school do you go to?"

"Kindergarten. We have gerbils. Emily says gerbils eat noses."

"Where do you live, Michele?"

"Right here. I don't want to talk anymore."

The phone clattered down but the connection remained unbroken. Caroline listened, straining to hear what fresh indignities Emily might

be visiting upon the hapless Michele. Only silence. Suddenly, Emily was back.

"You see how dumb she is? Mommy likes her best. She beats me, but she never beats Michele."

"Now listen, Emily. You're a big girl, and I'm sure you're doing a good job of looking after yourself and your sister. But I'd like to come over and help you out a little. Can you tell me the number of your house?"

"Sure. That's easy. It's 1825. It's in big gold numbers over the front door. We live on the third floor."

"That's fine. Now what about the street?"

Emily sighed.

"Emily," Caroline continued, "yesterday you said it sounded like 'Moocow.' Can you hold on a minute and I'll read you some street names and you tell me if any of them sound right."

"O.k." Emily sounded dubious. "I looked at the street sign today. It starts with an 'M,' but then all the letters get mixed up and I can't read it."

"Hold on, Emily. I'll be right back."

Caroline dashed to the kitchen and returned, breathed heavily, with the map and the list of street names.

"Emily? Are you still there? Now listen carefully." She began reading from the list. Each name brought a negative from Emily. Some were definitely not right, some sounded almost right but not quite, two evoked giggles. None of the fifteen names on Caroline's list was the right one.

Emily, obviously wanting to be helpful and enjoying the game, said, "I think it has an 'l' in it, and a 'k.' K-l-m," she chanted, "M-l-k."

"M-l-k," repeated Caroline. "K-l-m. Klamath? M-l-k, milk?"

"That's right!" shouted Emily. "It sounds like milk."

Caroline consulted her street map for names that hadn't made it onto her list.

"Sounds like milk. How about Milliken?"

"That's it! That's it! Milkilen. Mikkilen."

Caroline's excitement grew, but she managed to keep her voice calm. "1825 Milliken Street. All right, Emily. You and Michele stay right there. I'll be over just as soon as I can."

"Oh, Mrs. Anderson, don't come. Please don't come. Mommy'll be

home from work soon, and she won't like it."

"That's all right, Emily. I'd like to talk to your mommy too. See you in a little while."

Caroline ran a comb through her hair, slipped into a jacket and snatched up purse, street map and car keys. As she locked the apartment door, she heard the phone jangling inside. She hesitated for a moment. Should she go back inside and answer it? It might be Ted. Should she tell him of her success in locating the girls? No, if she did she would have to tell him of her plan to go and see them and he would tell her not to get involved. She would tell him this evening, after she'd seen the girls and done what she could for them. Caroline moved away from the apartment door and down to the elevator. The phone continued its distant ringing until the elevator came and bore her away to the basement garage.

She was uncomfortable behind the wheel of the small car. Even with the seat pushed back as far as it would go, there wasn't much leeway. The seat belt was adjusted to capacity and sat absurdly on top of her bulging stomach. As she drove along the familiar crosstown streets, she wondered what she would find when she got to her destination. She was prepared for anything. Milliken Street was in an area she'd never visited and knew nothing about. Would she find a grimy tenement with flaking paint and scurrying roaches? Or would it be a prim row of genteel boardinghouses, lace curtains and snake plants in the windows? For all she knew, it might be a mammoth housing project or a faceless new condominium.

What would she do when she got there? Well, she'd figure that out once she saw the girls. At the very least, she might be able to persuade their mother to enroll them in a day-care center after school. Emily sounded as if she could use a little therapy, but there might be too much resistance for that. She'd play it by ear and put them in touch with Family Service. That's really all she could do. Then at least she'd know they wouldn't have to be left alone anymore.

After crossing a bridge, with a quick glance down at the sprawling network of railroad tracks beneath, Caroline found herself in strange territory. She pulled over to the curb to check the map. Milliken Street wasn't far. According to the map, it angled off from the street she was on and meandered crookedly into a tangle of short crowded

streets and alleys bunched together into a spider web. It seemed to bisect the web and come to a halt at the far side where a superhighway was indicated by a double red line.

Caroline drove on slowly, counting blocks and watching street signs. The street was a busy one. Impatient cars honked and passed her. She crawled along in the exhaust of a bus that stopped at every corner. The sidewalks were lined with small shops whose grimy windows displayed everything from wedding photographs and color televisions to limp vegetables wilting in splintered crates. People surged in and out of the shops. Children played in littered doorways. In front of certain store fronts whose window glass had been painted an anonymous dark green, men sat on boxes and dilapidated kitchen chairs and watched. Occasional bands of three or four tall elegant young men swaggered down the street, their bright clothes a marked counterpoint to the prevailing gray weariness, their frothy natural hair topped off by huge caps of black, red and green or by immaculate white Borsalino hats. After one of these youths stared insolently at her through the car window, Caroline clicked down all the lock buttons. She wasn't frightened, but she knew she was out of place here and there was no sense in taking chances.

She came upon Milliken Street suddenly. The bus creaked on its way, its passage revealing a street sign that tilted crazily upward atop its post. Caroline turned gratefully off the busy street and drove for several blocks. A small brick house with green shutters proclaimed itself to be No. 262. Still a long way to go—but as Caroline drove along Milliken Street, she was heartened by its apparent respectability. Back on the swarming shopping street she had been tempted to turn back, and when Emily called again to tell her there was nothing that she could do for her and to please stop calling. Now that she was here on Milliken Street, her resolution returned, bolstered by the rows of neat small houses interspersed here and there by a four- or five-story apartment building.

Milliken Street twisted and turned, and the occasional passerby paid no attention to the small blue car that traveled its length, slowing now and then for the driver to check her progress. A drugstore on this corner, a newsstand and tobacconist on the opposite, a dry cleaner and launderette side by side across the street, all served to allay Caroline's apprehensions and she drove on.



Abruptly, the rows of neat houses gave way to blank-fronted loft buildings. Battered signs announced apparently defunct commercial enterprises. Some line of demarcation had been crossed and Caroline hesitated. She peered down the remainder of Milliken Street which seemed to end in a large hulking dark mass several blocks away. Still, she'd come this far. If the girls lived at this end of Milliken Street, among these deserted warehouses, they really needed help. She drove on.

If she didn't see any more houses in the next block, she'd turn back, she told herself—but there were houses. Three gray houses with tattered curtains and sagging stoops leaned against each other as if for companionship against the surrounding blight. Overflowing garbage cans and a grinning dog at an open second-story window were definite signs of life. Caroline's apprehensions returned. The girls couldn't possibly live in this disaster area!

All right. One more block and then I get out of here, Caroline told herself. One more block brought her face to face with the massive black end of Milliken Street. Gaping double doors, wide and high enough to admit a truck, slanted backward into a deeper blackness. The building stretched across the end of the street and continued in both directions, empty and threatening. End of the line. Caroline stopped the car in mid-block and scanned both sides of the street in search of numbers. Where was 1825? Across the street a single small house crouched forlornly, its windows decorated with tall white X's. On either side, boarded-up warehouses loomed morosely. None of the buildings were numbered. There were no other cars on the street. No other people.

Caroline was about to swing a U-turn and go back the way she had come when a woman lurched out of the doorway of the house across the street. It was impossible to tell her age. She was painfully thin and her clothes flapped loosely on her body. Her pallor was unhealthy and was accentuated by the lank red hair that hung in greasy strands to her shoulders. She leaned wearily in the doorway and seemed not to notice Caroline in her shiny blue car across the street.

Caroline stared for a moment, wondering if this could be the girls' mother. Then she rolled down the window and called across to her. "Hi. I'm looking for number 1825. Do you know where it is?"

The woman raised her head but made no reply.

Caroline called again. "1825 Milliken Street. Is it near here?"

The woman muttered something and gestured toward the end of the street. Caroline couldn't hear what she said. The woman turned to go back indoors.

Caroline scrambled out of the car and hurried across the street. "Wait! Please wait! I couldn't hear you. I'm looking for 1825 Milliken Street."

The woman faced Caroline with something like annoyance in her glance. When she spoke again Caroline saw that several of her teeth were missing.

"I said maybe it's around the corner. The street, you know, it turns a lot."

Caroline continued. "I'm looking for two little girls who live there. Do you know of any children in the neighborhood?"

The woman took in Caroline's swollen body and suddenly turned loquacious.

"No kids around here. Nobody around here. Just me. It's all gonna come down and then there won't even be me. But I'm staying until they throw me out. Got no heat and got no lights, but I'm staying. Urban Renewal they call it. I call it shoving me around." The woman trembled as she spoke, either with rage or illness. She mumbled over her problem for a moment, then suddenly shifted back to Caroline's quest. "No kids around here. You're gonna have a kid. You shouldn't be hanging around down here. What are you hanging around for?"

"I'm looking for two little girls," Caroline explained again. "They live at 1825 Milliken Street. I've got to find them."

Disinterest clouded the woman's face. "I dunno. Maybe around the corner." She waved a shaky hand toward the end of the street.

Caroline felt eyes follow her as she marched purposefully to the corner. She wondered if the woman were seriously ill. She might be an alcoholic or a drug addict. As Caroline quickened her pace, she looped the strap of her pocketbook over her shoulder and tucked the bag securely under her arm.

Long shadows lay across the street and a chill wind pasted scraps of paper to her ankles. Caroline shivered and scanned the building fronts, looking for numbers that could connect this wasteland with the officially recognizable world that offered shelter and safety. She reached the corner and peered around it.

Caroline felt as if she'd suddenly been transported to a movie set. The row of buildings ended abruptly like a false-fronted western town, and behind them stretched a nightmare landscape of rubble and twisted girders. Here and there a wall stood alone, gray sky luminous through staring window slots. The wreckers had begun their work. Across the way, the deserted factory staggered off into the infinity of late afternoon. From behind it there came a subdued hissing roar from the superhighway. People were on their way home from work. Time she went home too. Out of the corner of her eye, as she took one final look around, Caroline caught a hint of movement within the gaping doors of the deserted factory, a shadow that quickly faded back into deeper shadow. *Nonsense, she told herself, there's nobody there. You're imagining things.* She stared into the gloom for a long moment, scalp prickling and each breath sharp and shallow. Then she turned and started back up the street to the haven of her little blue car, a distant half block away. The red-haired woman was no longer watching from her doorway. There wasn't another soul in sight.

She tried to run, but all she could manage was a fast shuffle. Why had Emily lied to her? Told her she lived in this desolate, condemned wilderness? Maybe it was a mistake. Emily could have mistaken Milliken Street for some other street that sounded similar. It was Caroline's own fault for pressing the issue. Maybe there was another Milliken Street in some other town. She had assumed that this was the right one and ignored the possibility of Emily's burning up the long-distance wires. Her thoughts skittered wildly as she hurried toward the car. Her legs felt tired and heavy as if she were plodding through clinging mud.

The afternoon sun slanted yellow light against the building fronts, turning the remaining top-floor windows into pitiless golden eyes. In the street, Caroline struggled through the deepening twilight. An interminable length of cracked and littered sidewalk still stretched between her and the car. Where was the red-haired woman? Had she gone back inside her wreck of a house? Even her presence would relieve the dreadful emptiness of this nightmare wasteland. The silence was broken only by Caroline's hurrying footsteps and the distant roar of the highway. Time hung vacant and unmoving in the heavy afternoon.

Behind her a furtive pattering invaded the stillness. Had there really been someone hiding in the shadows of the deserted factory? Was he

following her now? Without stopping, Caroline glanced back over her shoulder. The pattering noise stopped and the street was empty behind her. Was he hiding in a doorway? Or was it just the wind blowing bits of trash through the littered gutters? Scarcely breathing, head pounding, a tinny taste of fear in her mouth, Caroline ran. The car was just a few yards away.

The brick came from nowhere, a crumbled piece of the pervading desolation lying in her path. Caroline saw it a split second too late. She tried to avoid it, but her foot was already upon it. With a grating wrench, her ankle twisted. She felt herself toppling heavily to the sidewalk. She tried to break her fall, but there was nothing to cling to. She tried to twist her body to protect its precious burden, but only succeeded in knocking her head against a fire hydrant. A brief flash of pain, and then she felt nothing.

She didn't see the red-haired woman dash from her doorway. She didn't hear the harsh voice nor feel the rough hands trying to shake her into consciousness. She lay insensible on the sidewalk as the woman took a dime from her pocketbook and ran off up the street to the nearest telephone. She didn't feel the first grinding birth contraction, nor any of the ones that followed. She never knew that the red-haired woman returned and pillowed her bleeding head in her lap until the first sirens screeched down Milliken Street and policemen and white-coated attendants gathered around her.

Ten days later, Caroline Anderson entered her apartment. Ted hovered protectively behind her. High on her forehead, almost concealed by her hair, she wore a small bandage. She walked slowly, her slender body slightly bent, her arms hanging limp at her sides.

"I should get down to the office. Will you be all right?" Ted had spent several days and most nights at her hospital bedside.

"Yes." The monosyllable came grudgingly from her lips.

"Is there anything I can get you before I go?"

"No."

"I wish you'd perk up, Caroline. There's no sense in brooding. We'll have another chance. All we can do is look to the future."

"Yes. You go along now." Caroline drooped into an armchair and turned her head slightly so that his kiss fell on her jaw.

She watched him go out the door. Poor Ted. He didn't understand,

and she couldn't explain it to him. He thought it was losing the baby that had her down, but it wasn't that, although that was bad enough. It was the betrayal, the double betrayal. Emily's for leading her to that awful place, and her own gambling with her baby's life. How could she have been so selfish? Tears lurked behind Caroline's eyelids. She lurched out of her chair and wandered moodily to the doorway of the empty nursery. The crib occupied one corner, bare and white. The chest of drawers stood amid the clutter of its contents, unpainted. Caroline contemplated the tiny silent room and wondered how she would live with this room accusing her daily.

The telephone rang. She seemed not to hear. It rang again and again. At last she moved wearily to the bedroom extension and picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Oh, Mrs. Anderson. Have you been away? I called and called every day. I wanted to explain."

"Emily?" Caroline's voice was a barely audible whisper.

"Well, yes. Except that Emily isn't really my name. Remember the afternoon you were going to come over? Well, I called you back right away to tell you the truth, but I guess you'd left already. You never found Emily and Michele, did you?"

"No. I never found them." Caroline wondered about the voice on the phone. It seemed older somehow, not a bit childish.

"Well, I'm sorry about that. It was really dumb to give you a made-up address. But you kept asking me. I had to tell you something."

"Why? Why did you call me in the first place?"

"Oh, Mrs. Anderson, I hope you're not mad at me. I just had to talk to someone. But I couldn't talk to anyone I knew. I couldn't tell the truth or let anyone know who I was, because of my mother. I mean, she might have lost her job if anyone found out. I mean about her drinking and all the rest of it. And then I remembered how really nice you were when I was in your reading group in fifth grade. You were the only nice teacher I ever had. First I called the school but they said you weren't there anymore. I called a lot of Andersons before I found you. I remembered your voice right away. You helped me a lot when I was little. I thought maybe you could help me again. But I couldn't even tell you. So I started pretending all that stuff about Emily and Michele. And then I couldn't stop."

The voice babbled on. Caroline listened, only half aware of the flood

LOOKING FOR MILLIKEN STREET

of words. In her mind, she was back on that gloomy, desolate street, the vacant buildings pressing in on all sides, the indefinable menace behind her. Would she ever be able to forget? Would it help to let Emily know what she had done? Emily?

"What is your name?" Caroline asked. "How old are you?"

"I won't tell you my name," the voice replied. "I'm fourteen. I'll be fifteen in January. And everything's going to be all right now. My father came back to live with us. That part of it was true. And Mommy joined A.A. so she'll be getting better. Everything's going to be all right."

"I see." Caroline's face flushed hot with resentment. Everything might be all right for the person she knew as Emily, but would anything ever be all right for herself? "You really told a convincing story. What about Michele?"

"There isn't any Michele. I never had a sister. That was me too. Anyway, I wanted to thank you for listening to me. I really would have told you the truth from the beginning, but I was so ashamed. And I'm sorry if you went on a wild-goose chase. I hope you're not mad at me."

Caroline laid the receiver in her lap for a moment and thought of all the things she could say to this incredible child. She could blame her for the accident. She could tell her about the loss of the baby, call her a murderer. But what would that solve? Would it relieve her own anguish and guilt? She herself had been naive and impulsive, rushing headlong into danger on the strength of those phone calls. How would she ever rid herself of blame for her own gullibility? She heard the phone clucking in her lap and with a tight smile she picked it up.

"I'm not mad at you, Emily. And I'm glad everything's working out for you. But please don't ever call me again."

"Oh, I won't. I just wanted to be sure you understood. I feel so much better now. Goodbye. And thanks a lot."

"Goodbye, Emily."

Caroline sat quietly beside the phone for a few moments. Then she got up and walked calmly to the nursery and sat on the floor beside the chest of drawers. If she remembered correctly, the bottom drawer held all of her old school records. How lucky that she'd kept them. "Emily" had given her the clue. It shouldn't be too difficult to figure out which year she had taught her. And from that year, she ought to be able to

determine which of the girls was the right girl. All she had to do was think back and remember. The voice and the year were all she had to go on, and the voice was seared into her brain.

She opened the bottom drawer and slowly pulled out the stacks of looseleaf folders. Once she'd located the girl it would only be a matter of time and patience, of waiting and watching for the right opportunity. Traffic accidents happened every day. Children died tragically in swimming pools and on playing fields. They fell under buses and off bridges. This time, she would find "Emily," and then. . .

Caroline knew all about waiting and being patient. Page by page, she began leafing through the record books.

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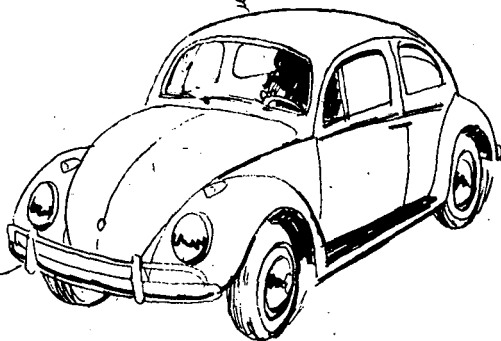
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*The trouble with precision may be that it often surfaces at the wrong time . . .*

## ***So Simple*** ***by Carroll Mayers***



**Although** his private office was comfortably air-conditioned, one particular afternoon saw Mason Randolph visibly perspiring an instant after he'd answered his phone. Primarily, this was because the caller identified himself as Herbert Dennison, head executive in the State Banking Examiner's office in Capitol City.

"How are you, Mason?" Mr. Dennison's pleasantry was brisk. "Everything under control?"



Randolph swallowed hard. "Yes, sir," he said, contriving to sound no less equable. "Everything's fine here."

"Glad to hear it," Mr. Dennison said. "I know this is highly irregular—giving out advance notice from this office—but the simple fact is we're running considerably behind schedule up here and I've got to wipe out the lag. That's why I decided to call. A couple of our fellows will be dropping down there tomorrow or the next day; I'd appreciate it if you'd facilitate their work. You know, everything on the line and ready, so they'll save time and finish up the same day. Can do?"

Randolph's temples were pounding now; he hoped his voice didn't break. "Sure thing, Mr. Dennison."

"No problems, then?"

"No problems."

"Fine. I appreciate this, Mason. Take care."

"You too, sir," Randolph said. "Thank you for calling."

Actually, thanks but no thanks because the Merchants Trust in the seaside community of Sea Vista was five thousand dollars short in overall funds—and Mason Randolph, bank manager, was responsible.

It had been so simple, initially: just the "borrowing" of a few hundred to cover some marginal market losses; but said losses, unaccountably, had burgeoned, and recovery had not been possible. Accordingly, additional borrowing had ensued—with additional forfeiture.

The net result was that the unfortunate shortage had continued up to this afternoon, and now the bank examiners were due tomorrow or the day following.

Randolph lay back in his chair, glumly staring at his desk top. He didn't look up as Miss Forrest, his private secretary, came in from her adjoining nook with the afternoon mail. Miss Forrest was a cheery person with a cheery smile; the smile abruptly waned.

"Mr. Randolph! Are you all right?"

He fumbled in the desk drawer, came up with a package of peppermint lozenges. "Just a touch of indigestion, Janet," he managed. "Don't trouble yourself."

As the girl withdrew, he popped one mint, then a second and third into his mouth. He had to do something! His entire banking career was in jeopardy, to say nothing of facing criminal charges . . .

Another visitor entered his sanctum. This time it was Harvey Landis,

an exceedingly meticulous and dedicated young man, new to the bank but determined to advance from his teller's position.

"Do you have a moment, sir?"

Randolph stifled a groan; clearly, he could expect no time for cogitation here. Still, these were banking hours and he was the bank manager, on duty as it were for any contingency. He drew a breath, resignedly eyed young Landis. "Yes, Harvey, what is it?"

"Perhaps I'm out of order, sir, but I felt you should know about this—"

"Yes, yes . . ."

"It's Miss Harriet Knowland, sir," the young teller said. "She's just come in and she wants to withdraw five thousand dollars. That's all but two thousand of her account."

Randolph blinked. The lady in question was one of Sea Vista's senior citizens, unmarried, a retired elementary-school teacher and presently serving as part-time librarian. Unquestionably a lady of limited income.

"She's asking for a cashier's check for the amount?" Randolph asked his employee.

Young Landis shook his head. "She'd like it in cash. Large bills. I thought perhaps you'd want to speak to her, sir."

"Does she appear agitated? Upset in any way?"

"No, sir."

Randolph considered. Strictly speaking, Miss Knowland's personal affairs were not the bank's concern. On the other hand, in advanced years mental faculties and judgment could be come a trifle suspect. Miss Knowland might be embarking on some speculative investment course (heaven forbid; consider himself!) without proper counsel . . .

For all his own dilemma, Randolph reached a decision. "You acted quite properly, Harvey," he acknowledged.

"I try to be helpful, sir."

"Yes . . . well, ask Miss Knowland to come in for a moment."

The teller's request met with no reluctance. Miss Knowland promptly popped into the office and perched, birdlike, on the edge of the visitor's chair. Behind thick lenses, her china blue eyes were bright and quizzical.

"It's about the money, isn't it, Mr. Randolph?"

"Yes, it is, Miss Knowland. I'm informed the amount is practically all of your life's savings. Naturally, the bank is—ah—concerned."

"You needn't be," Miss Knowland said. "My pension and Social Security are more than ample for my needs. Actually, the money is just lying here, drawing interest for which I've no real use."

The bank manager assented. "Of course. What I meant by the bank's concern was that you weren't—ah—being pressured or—ah—victimized in any way."

Her bright eyes snapped. "Well, I'm not," she informed him. Then, to soften her vehemence, she smiled slightly and added, "I do appreciate your attitude, but it isn't necessary, really. Actually, I'm giving the money to my nephew, Roger. He has an opportunity to become a prime backer in a new energizing process. It has to be cash because everything is strictly hush-hush at present."

Randolph stiffened. Although Roger Burke no longer resided in the area, he was not unknown in Sea Vista. The young man was . . . well, opportunistic, and over the years rumors of sundry scrapes and brushes with authority had drifted back to the community.

"I know what you're thinking," Miss Knowland said, "but you're wrong. Roger's straightened himself out. He's given me his word."

The bank manager was forced to demur. "You'll forgive me, but that's—ah—rather hard to believe," he said.

"Perhaps so, but it's true."

Randolph assayed another tack. "This new energizing process; exactly what is it?"

"I can't say specifically," Miss Knowland said, "but it has to do with the development of solar heating. Roger's quite enthusiastic about it." Randolph hesitated. "Miss Knowland," he ventured finally, "as your bank manager I have to say this: what you are doing is your own concern, of course. But I feel you are making a grave mistake."

Miss Knowland nodded perkily. "From you, I expected no less," she told him. "And I am appreciative. Now—may I have my money?"

Randolph felt constrained to protest further. "Regardless of the investment aspect, that's far too great an amount to take in cash. Even here in Sea Vista there've been robberies and holdups lately. I assume you are aware of that."

"I'm not worried. I'll have it only until tonight. Roger phoned me this morning; he's driving down from the city after work to pick it up." She arose. "It was pleasant talking with you, Mr. Randolph. Again, thank you for your concern."

Capitulating, Randolph escorted the woman back to young Landis. Returning to his office, he slumped in his chair. The whole charade was absurd. Miss Knowland, he was convinced, was throwing her money away. Five thousand dollars, just like that—

Then the manager jerked erect and his fingers beat a furious devil's tattoo on his desk top. Wait a minute! He hadn't been thinking—he hadn't been thinking at all . . .

Miss Knowland lived alone in a neat white bungalow on the far side of the community. The area was only partially developed, which meant that the chances of observation after dark were minimal. Well before dusk, Randolph parked down-block from the bungalow, in the shadow of a curb-side maple.

There was good reason to believe the nephew would not show up until after dark. Miss Knowland had mentioned his driving down "to-night," not "this evening," and while the two terms frequently were used interchangeably, her added reference to "after work" suggested that Burke had employment of sorts, which should preclude an early-afternoon departure from the city. That, plus the two-hour drive down, should insure his arrival well after dark this late fall evening.

Randolph was not at ease on the car cushions. A chunky individual with stubby arms and legs, he shifted constantly, doing battle both with his physique and his conscience. Confound it, he'd never done anything like this in his life before, but he simply couldn't ignore the opportunity. Call it Fate, coincidence, blind luck, the fact remained that Roger Burke shortly would be leaving his aunt's home with an amount of money—the *exact* amount—that Mason Randolph needed to cover his "borrowing" and protect his future. Furthermore, Miss Harriet Knowland's own future would not be imperiled in any degree. The woman herself had stated that the money was not essential to her modest needs. As for young Burke's own professed "opportunity"—forget it!

Randolph eased his position again, fingering the sock filled with wet sand in his lap while he checked the waning sun. Another half hour yet before darkness . . .

Then the bank manager swore softly as a yellow Volkswagen with capital-county plates cruised past, slowed down and angled toward the curb in the block ahead. Oh, no!

Oh, yes! Randolph had not seen Miss Knowland's nephew for several years, but there could be no doubt. Considerably fleshier, with a longer, more luxuriant hair-style, the young man shouldering from the car and striding confidently up Miss Knowland's walk with a briefcase tucked under his arm unquestionably was Roger Burke.

Randolph fumed. Burke probably would not linger to any extent after his aunt turned over the money, and a daylight scuffle simply would be too risky. Even if he managed to steal up behind the nephew and effectively wield the sock, grab the briefcase before the young man glimpsed him, the attack could be witnessed from a neighboring house, and a hue and cry raised . . .

Randolph all but wept. His only hope now was that Burke *did* linger and chat with his aunt.

However, in less than fifteen minutes Burke reappeared, loping down the walk, all smiles, carefully stowing the briefcase into the Volkswagen and driving off.

Utterly miserable, Randolph put his own car in gear and mechanically followed the yellow bug. Briefly, he considered trailing Burke to the open country, somehow forcing him off the road, snatching the money . . .

Ridiculous! His entire plan had been impossible, anyhow. Why he had ever imagined—

Then, miraculously, it was not impossible at all—because as the nephew retraced his route back through Sea Vista proper, he suddenly turned into the parking lot of a small cocktail lounge.

Following, Randolph tingled with exhilaration. Could it be? Yes, it was! Roger Burke obviously was delaying his trip back to Capitol City while he indulged in some alcoholic refreshment. He was getting out of the car now, taking the briefcase with him . . .

So it transpired that some thirty minutes later, when young Burke emerged from the lounge and it was quite dark, he was slugged over the left temple with a makeshift blackjack and his briefcase wrenched from his grasp as he slumped unconscious to the ground.

Mason Randolph was in excellent spirits the following morning. He hummed blithely as he dressed, ate a hearty breakfast, and departed for the bank a half hour early. All he needed was a few minutes unobserved with a certain cash drawer in the vault.

He did not achieve his objective immediately. An unexpected visitor in the person of Sheriff Dalton Helms was awaiting him outside the bank. The lawman smiled apologetically as Randolph approached. "Morning, Mason. I know I'm an early bird, but I figured to see you before you got too tied up with your day's routine."

A flutter of apprehension rippled through Randolph, but he fought it down. The sheriff's manner was easy and his smile held. Besides, the man wasn't all that bright.

Randolph forced a smile of his own as they entered the bank and he led the way into his private office. He waved Helms to the visitor's chair and casually deposited his attaché case atop a filing cabinet.

"What's the problem, Dalton?" he inquired, sitting behind his desk.

The sheriff crossed lanky limbs. "It's about Roger Burke," he said. "You know, Miss Harriet Knowland's nephew."

Randolph frowned. "You mean he's back in town?"

"More than that. He hunted me up after hours last night, claimed he'd been slugged unconscious in the parking lot at Sam Gordon's place and five thousand dollars was stolen from him."

The frown deepened. "Five thousand!"

"Correct," the sheriff said. "Burke swears his aunt gave it to him—something about a special business deal, cash only—and she backs him up." He paused, uncertain. "You know how it's always been with that young fellow, Mason. If he's in some sort of jam now, trying to pull himself out, possibly his aunt would feel she ought to lend her weight. That's why I wanted to talk to you. Do you know if Miss Knowland withdrew or borrowed any large amount of money recently?"

Randolph felt less apprehensive. "As a matter of fact, she did," he acknowledged. "Yesterday afternoon. Five thousand exactly."

"You didn't counsel her? Try to discourage her?"

"Of course I did," the manager proclaimed virtuously. "The moment I learned of her intention." He spread his hands. "In the end, though, what could I do? The woman insisted."

The sheriff indicated his understanding. "It could have happened," he mused. "The nephew's slugging, I mean. We've had similar incidents lately . . ."

"Yes, we have," Randolph contributed.

Helms recrossed his legs, rested his chin on steepled forefingers his lean features reflective. He gave no sign of immediate departure.

A spate of disquietude pricked Randolph. Sounds emanating from beyond his sanctum proclaimed the business of the day getting under way. The manager flicked a glance at the attaché case, inhaled silently. The one imperative was to get the money out of his office and back to the bank's coffers as soon as possible. He dare not chance leaving it on the filing cabinet.

A bold strategem, then—

Shoving erect, Randolph murmured, "Excuse me one moment." He retrieved the attaché cash, withdrew its contents, then moved to the door of his office.

Teller Harvey Landis appeared promptly. "Yes, sir?"

"I've decided all the tellers should have more cash on hand for peak periods, Harvey," the manager said simply. "Distribute these vault funds proportionately, will you?"

As young Landis withdrew, Randolph noted that Helms was still in deep contemplation. He cleared his throat. "Well, Dalton?"

The sheriff started, then climbed to his feet. "Sorry," he said, shaking his head. "I just can't throw off the notion that this whole business is off-center, somehow—"

He broke off as Harvey Landis came back into the office, an odd expression on his face. He still held the money packets Randolph had turned over to him.

The manager scowled. "What is it, Harvey?"

"It's these bills, Mr. Randolph," the young teller said. "I don't understand it. They're the same ones I gave to Miss Knowland when she was here yesterday." He hesitated momentarily. "I—I rather thought Miss Knowland would draw out the money regardless of how you might advise her, so I decided to take the opportunity while she was in your office to record the serial numbers. Because of the large amount and the circumstances, sir." He advanced, spread the money packets on his employer's desk. "You know how I try to be precise in everything—"

Randolph, alas, knew all too well. Sheriff Helms, possibly, did not. However, the abrupt glimmer in the lawman's gaze suggested his level of comprehension was considerably higher than that the bank manager had credited to him.

Miss Forrest, cheery as ever, stuck her head around the office door. "The examiners are here, Mr. Randolph," she said.

*Emerson reminded us that every sweet has its sour, every evil its good . . .*

# Hiding Out

by Henry Slesar



The arrival of the letter was a challenge to the silence and decorum of the Holy Name Convent. In the cloister, the nuns bent their heads low and murmured about it. In the refectory, the lay sisters whispered the news as they prepared for the midday meal. Even the students in the classrooms seemed to know that the postman's visit had somehow altered the serene pace and heartbeat of the convent.

Yet only three people knew what the letter contained, and what Wil-



liam Michael Downey had to say to old Sister Lydia after forty years. The Reverend Mother Margaret knew, and the Subprioress, Sister Therese, and, of course, Sister Lydia herself. Mother Margaret visited the old woman in the infirmary and read the letter into the ailing nun's ear. Sister Lydia was eighty-one, partially paralyzed by a stroke, and William Downey had been her student at a time so distant it might have defied memory; but Sister Lydia remembered, and brought tears, mysteriously, from the dry well of her eyes.

When Mother Margaret returned to her office, her gentleness of manner evaporated. She slapped the letter to the surface of her desk with a sound that made Sister Therese start.

"You're angry," the Subprioress said. "That awful man. . ."

"I'm not judging Mr. Downey," the Reverend Mother said, "but his request annoys me. If he has such an important matter to discuss, he might do us the courtesy of discussing it here." She sat down heavily in her chair. "Did you say that Sister Pamela wanted to see me?"

"Yes, she's terribly anxious. I'm sure you know what she wants. Her time is close, not more than two weeks." Sister Therese caught her lower lip in a timid bite. "I don't think she's going to stay, Mother Margaret. I'm sure that's what she wants to tell you."

The Superior hardly seemed to be listening, her mind busy with a sudden concentration of problems.

"We'll have to do what Mr. Downey says, of course, if only for Sister Lydia's sake. Her affection for that man is the wonder of my life." She looked sharply at her officer. "What would you think of sending Sister Pamela and Sister Jem on this errand?"

"Sister Pamela? But I just told you—"

"Yes, I heard you. But with half the convent down with flu, and Easter so close. . . Besides, it might be just what Sister Pamela needs, a day or two away from things. A chance to meet with the world. . ."

"But that's exactly her trouble, Mother Margaret, you know that. She's become so. . . introverted."

The Superior frowned. "You read too much psychology, Sister. You're altogether too modern for me. In my day, Sister Pamela's shyness would have been diagnosed differently. She needs firmness, not Freud."

"But an errand like this? To visit a *criminal*?"

The Reverend Mother paused to consider the objection. Then she

smiled and said, "Ask Sister Pamela to see me."

She was young. The eyes below the short black veil had looked out at the world for little more than twenty-two years. She had been raised as an orphan at Holy Name, and made the transition from student to postulant at seventeen. For the last three years she had been Temporarily Professed, and the time for her final vows had come. But even without open declaration of her intent, the convent sisters knew what Sister Pamela was going to do. They read the signs in the sudden outbursts of tears that marked her first years under the veil. They saw it in the awkwardness with which she fulfilled her duties. And in the last few months, they had seen it in a brooding silence that was more than religious withdrawal.

But Mother Margaret was in no mood to face solemn decisions. Instead of giving the young nun permission to speak her mind, she picked up the letter and launched into a brisk explanation of the mission.

"Did you ever hear of a man named William Downey? He was a student at the convent long before you were born."

"No, Reverend Mother," Sister Pamela whispered.

"Consider yourself fortunate." She tapped the edge of the letter on her knuckles. "He's not someone we're proud of. He and Sister Lydia were once quite close, and he's just written her this letter. It asks for some representative of the Holy Name to pay him a visit. Not on a spiritual errand."

Sister Pamela looked baffled.

"The man is a known criminal," Mother Margaret said flatly. "He's spent many years in prison, and far too many, I gather, out of it. His crimes have earned him a certain amount of material success, and even a degree of false respectability. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"I think so, Reverend Mother."

The Superior paused. "I'm sending you and Sister Jem to see him. It's only a day's journey; you'll have to take the train into New York and then board another for Connecticut where he makes his home. If you leave tomorrow morning, you could return by Saturday at the latest."

Sister Pamela raised a hand to her white lips. "But Reverend Mother—"

"I'm sure the trip will do you good, Sister. I know how peaked you've been lately."

"May I speak, Mother Margaret?"

The Superior frowned, and nodded.

"I asked to see you about something else. In two weeks, my temporary vows are over, and—"

"Please, Sister!" The Reverend Mother stood up. "This matter is too important to discuss now. You know the difficulties we've had with illness; our students are suffering and our chores are neglected. When you and Sister Jem return—"

The pale eyes were lowered. "Yes, Reverend Mother."

Mother Margaret smiled softly, and put her arms around the robed shoulders of the young nun, walking her to the door. "Sister Therese will speak to you about the journey. Don't be afraid of this man Downey, your strength is greater than his. And take good care of Sister Jem," she added with a twinkle. "She may not have your courage."

Sister Pamela bowed, and left the office.

*Courage*, she said in bitterness to her reflection in the train window. Was there gentle irony in Mother Margaret's use of the word? Courage was the least of her qualities; sometimes she thought the habit she wore was only a disguise, a concealment from a world too difficult to understand.

On the seat beside her, Sister Jem's straw hamper swayed and toppled against her. When Sister Jem came down the aisle, teetering with arms outstretched, her round puckered face was almost comical in its anxiety. She dropped into the seat with a relieved sigh.

"A hundred miles an hour!" she gasped.

"No." Sister Pamela smiled. "Fifty or sixty perhaps. We're due to arrive in West Rock at one o'clock, and it's only forty miles from the terminal."

"Arithmetic!" Sister Jem said scornfully. Then she studied the landscape and became more cheerful. "It's such a lovely day! Spring is such a nice season, isn't it?"

"Yes," Sister Pamela agreed.

"It's the time of birth, isn't it? The trees, the flowers; even our Lord was reborn in the Spring, wasn't He? I'm glad Mr. Downey wrote Sister Lydia, aren't you?"

"I don't know. I've yet to hear anything good about Mr. Downey."

"Why, there's good in everyone," Sister Jem said comfortably. She turned to look at her companion's face, searching for an answer to her unhappy mood.

She still hadn't solved the riddle by the time the train steamed to a halt at the small suburban station called West Rock. The depot taxi driver gawked curiously at the two black-robed sisters and looked even more astonished when he learned their destination.

The drive to William Downey's estate was a short one. The house was a twin-gabled rambling structure built on a green knoll, with a manicured lawn rolling hundreds of feet to a wooded valley. There was a gatehouse, a barn with empty box stalls and half a dozen outbuildings. Mother Margaret hadn't exaggerated the material success of Mr. Downey; he was plainly a rich man.

The servant who answered the door had a flattened nose and thick speech; later Sister Jem said that he was probably more bodyguard than butler, and she may have been correct.

"Come in, Sisters," he said respectfully. "Mr. Downey's takin' a nap. He said I was to show you in and make yourselves at home."

"Thank you," Sister Pamela said coolly.

Their greatest surprise was waiting inside. The house was richly decorated, the carpets sinfully luxurious and the furnishings chosen more for effect than comfort. It was more than a house; it was a museum. Every wall panel boasted a painting, the majority religious in both subject and feeling, and where there were no paintings there was statuary, sculptured Madonnas, icons blurred with age and golden with beauty, a triptych depicting the Ascension, an enormous bas-relief that might have come straight from the walls of the Vatican.

Sister Jem gaped openly at her surroundings. Sister Pamela hid her surprise in a smile.

"I see what Mr. Downey meant," she said. "It's not hard to feel at home here."

"I'll show you to your rooms," the butler said. "Maybe you'd like to take a little nap yourselves. Mr. Downey usually comes downstairs for tea at four o'clock."

"That will be fine," Sister Jem said brightly.

They were guided to adjoining guest rooms on the second floor. Sister Jem took the servant at his word and settled happily into the thick

comfort of the bed, but Sister Pamela couldn't sleep. She wandered around the small sunny room, wishing she hadn't finished her book on the train. At length she decided there would be no harm in visiting the bookshelves she had seen in Mr. Downey's livingroom. She left her room quietly and returned downstairs.

She was scanning the crammed shelves beside the fireplace when she heard the soft thud of the rubber-tipped cane in the doorway.

"Good afternoon, Sister," William Downey said.

She turned, flushing guiltily.

Downey's appearance didn't ease her embarrassment. He was a man in his late sixties, but he had lost nothing in stature or dignity—nor did his white hair soften the hardness of his eyes. He held his head so erectly that he looked downward past his aquiline nose with an expression that was hawklike and even cruel.

"You must be Sister Pamela," he said, walking into the room. He didn't limp; the cane must have been an affectation.

"Yes," she said. "Sister Jem is resting upstairs." She smiled weakly. "How did you know which sister I am?"

"I have sources." He laughed and lowered himself into a chair. "I'd feel a lot better if you'd sit too."

"Of course." She took the opposite wing chair and folded her hands in her lap.

"Mother Lydia has been writing me for years," the man said. "Don't ask me why, I never reply to her letters—but she sends me bulletins on the old place on the average of three or four a year."

"It probably hasn't changed much since you were there. It rarely changes."

"No," Downey said. "But people do, don't they?" His grin insinuated something Sister Pamela couldn't understand. "Take yourself, for instance. Wouldn't you say you've changed?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean."

"Mother Lydia talked about you in her letters. About your shyness, about a lot of things."

The nun flushed again, feeling exposed and vulnerable.

"She's always worried about you, Mother Lydia has. She's a smart old woman; she knows what people are really like." He continued to grin at her, knowledgeably, and she tried a change of subject.

"Your home is lovely. You must be a great admirer of religious art."

"Yes. Funny, isn't it? An old heathen like me?"

"I can't believe that—"

"No?" He rubbed the cane handle against his chin. "You just ask Mother Lydia. You see, I feel the same way about the convent as you do, Sister. For some people, it's a great hideout."

She stood up, swallowing hard. "I'm sorry. I'd rather not hear any more about the convent, Mr. Downey. I hardly think you're an authority."

"You mean it isn't true?" He laughed. "I can tell just by looking at you, Sister. You've been hiding out in that place since you were a child. You never had a 'calling'—you just wanted to stay out of this noisy, messy world of ours."

"Please, Mr. Downey!"

"All right, all right." He pushed himself up on the cane. "I won't give you a hard time, Sister, that's not what I got you here for."

"Then what did you want?"

He chuckled and walked to the bellpull. When the flat-nosed servant appeared in the doorway, Downey said, "Bring it in, Ralph." Downey looked at the nun. "Our business won't take very long, Sister. But I hope you and your friend will stay for dinner."

"If it won't be long, I'd rather take the evening train."

"Whatever you say."

Ralph reappeared. He was holding something wrapped in heavy linen. He brought it to Downey, who rested his cane against the fireplace.

"This is what I wanted," Downey said. "I wanted to give Mother Lydia this."

He removed the cloth and exposed a statuette little more than a foot high. It was bronze, and age had taken its sheen and color but not its beauty. It was an image of St. Francis of Assisi.

Sister Pamela touched the smooth surface.

"It's beautiful! You wanted to give Sister Lydia this?"

"Yes," Downey said. "When I heard the old woman was ill, I thought I'd like to send her something. It should look nice in the chapel, don't you think?"

"It is *very* kind of you, Mr. Downey—"

"I would have preferred giving it to Mother Lydia personally, but I'll be damned if I'll set foot in that place again."

"You won't be damned," Sister Pamela smiled. She took the statuette in her hands and examined it more closely. Then, with a sudden inkling of its worth, she said, "It must be very old!"

"About five centuries. It comes from the Medici Palace, and it was sculpted by a rather famous man called Donatello. Do you know him, Sister?"

"Donatello? Then it's terribly valuable!"

"Value isn't a word we use, Sister," he said ironically. "We like the word 'priceless.' You could probably build half a dozen convents with that little piece of bronze."

"I don't know what to say. It's such a magnificent gift—"

"Be sure to give it to Mother Lydia immediately on your return. Tell her that little Willie is sorry he never replied to her letters, and that he hopes this will make it up to her. But don't pour it on too thick, Sister."

The nun stood up. "I must show this to Sister Jem." She turned from the doorway, her eyes shining. "She was right about you, you know, Sister Jem—"

"Oh? And what did Sister Jem say?"

"That there's good in everyone."

Downey laughed heartily, in pure enjoyment.

Sister Jem didn't stop talking throughout the journey from West Rock to Grand Central Station. She talked about Downey, the magnificence of his house and the grandeur of his collection, and expounded on his character without having said more than "goodbye" to him.

"You see?" she said delightedly. "You see what I told you about people? He'd *have* to be a good man to do something like this." Then she had a momentarily dark thought. "I just hope he came by it honestly," she said.

When they left the train at the terminal, the main floor of the station was crowded with Friday-night travelers heading for weekend trains. Her suitcase, with its bronze weight, was a strain on Sister Pamela's arm. She shifted it from one hand to the other without gaining any relief. Then Sister Jem discovered that she had misplaced the train schedule Sister Theresa had given them, and they went in search of the information booth.

They learned the time and track number at last, and headed for the

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gate with only minutes to spare. Sister Pamela was panting with exertion, and when the young man in the checkered coat came to her side and lifted his hat she looked at him with startled eyes.

"Can I help you, Sister? That suitcase looks heavy."

"It's all right, thank you, I can manage."

"Please, Sister, I'd like to help." He took the suitcase from her hand, giving her an amiable, lopsided smile. "Where are you headed?"

"Track 24."

She looked back at Sister Jem, who was struggling through the crowd with her hamper. Sister Jem waved and caught up, and they both followed the young man, walking a little too rapidly for them through the crowds. Sister Pamela gathered her skirts and hurried to keep him in sight. Sister Jem called for her to wait.

"Hurry, Sister," the young nun said. "We only have a few minutes. Thank heavens for that man—"

He was well in front of them now, not looking back to see if they were behind him. Then, with bewildering suddenness, they lost sight of him in the crowd, and Sister Pamela had her first pang of fear.

"I don't see him!" Sister Jem gasped. "Where did he go, Sister?"

"It's all right. I'm sure it's all right. He knows the track number, he'll be there—"

The crowd seemed to be flowing in the opposite direction—a human current that had to be fought. They pushed their way through until they saw their platform number. A conductor was at the gate, preparing to close it.

"He's not here!" Sister Jem said. "Sister Pamela? Do you see him anywhere?"

"No! But he must be here! Perhaps he's gone onto the train." She went up to the conductor and asked if he had seen the young man in the checked coat. He seemed unable to hear her in the din; she spoke louder.

"Sorry, Sister, an awful lot of people came through the gate."

Sister Jem was walking in a circle, scanning every face, searching every hand.

"He's not here! He's not here!" she moaned. "Oh, how could you have done that, Sister? How could you have trusted that man?"

"He *has* to be here!"

But he wasn't; and while the train pulled away from the station, the



two nuns of the Holy Name searched the swift-moving blur of hands and faces inside the train and out, hoping and praying that the man in the checkered coat would appear, not wanting to believe that this small act of courtesy was an act of terrible villainy.

Sister Pamela had never associated gentleness with the police, but the solemn-faced men who talked with her and Sister Jem were quiet-spoken and kindly. Lieutenant Jacoby was the most understanding; he seemed to recognize the personal agony of Sister Pamela's loss.

"You don't have to blame yourself, Sister," he told her. "It's the sort of thing that happens all the time; a lot of people come to the big city and think they can trust everybody."

She had lost the power to weep. There had been too long a flow of tears in the hours following the crime. She stared straight ahead at the dull-green walls of the station house.

"We're dealing with a particularly low-type of thief, the kind that picks on kids and old ladies—and anyone they figure to be a trusting, easy mark." Jacoby didn't look so gentle now. "It's doubtful that he knows what he has, of course. His ignorance is in our favor. We're keeping the fact quiet, for whatever it's worth."

"The thing he took is priceless," Sister Pamela whispered. "Don't you understand? It's an art treasure; it wouldn't do him any good."

"Well, we can't count on that. There are crooks and crooks these days, Sister, some of them dealing in Picassos. There are collectors who don't mind stolen merchandise, even if they can't display it openly. But we're assuming that the thief won't know it's anything more than a nicely shaped hunk of old bronze."

Jacoby rubbed his bald spot and sighed. Then he came around the front of his desk to face the young nun.

"The trick is to find him. I won't fool you; it won't be easy. We're rounding up every shady character we can think of, men who've worked this kind of dodge in the past—"

"I'm sorry about the photographs. All those faces—they didn't mean anything to me."

"We're not surprised at that. But sometimes, a demeanor, a voice, a way of standing is better identification than a face. That's why we've asked you and Sister Jem to come to this lineup."

"Will we—I mean, can these men see us in the audience?"

"No, Sister. But if you spot anyone who looks like our friend, be sure and tell us immediately. Are you ready?"

"Yes," Sister Pamela said.

Sister Jem was waiting in the anteroom. She went quickly to her companion's side and they followed Lieutenant Jacoby to the darkened room where the parade of suspects would march across the ruled backdrop.

For almost an hour they watched the sullen faces, the shuffling walks, the arrogant grins of a hundred strangers. The brilliant lights became painful to the young nun's eyes; the droning voice of the uniformed inquisitor became a senseless monotone, the muttered replies of the suspects less and less distinguishable.

When the young man with the twisted grin stepped out of the line at the officer's command, his first reply made Sister Pamela stiffen to attention.

"James K. Bresson. What can I do for you, Sarge?"

"I'll ask the questions. Take off your hat."

Bresson took it off. His lank, dark hair fell across his forehead. He would have been good-looking except for a bristly jaw and imperfect teeth.

Jacoby saw Sister Pamela's motion.

"Recognize him, Sister?"

"I'm—not sure. There was something about the voice. . . ."

"What are you doing these days, Bresson?" The sergeant asked. "Still working the terminals?"

"You got me all wrong, Sarge. I'm duly employed."

"And who'd duly employ you, Bresson?"

"I'm working for the Gramercy Printing Company over on Twenty-ninth Street. I'm in the shipping department."

"Not snatching any more suitcases?"

"I never snatched a suitcase. That last time was a bum rap."

She squinted at the man's face, her heart pounding. She tried to recreate the elusive moment in the station, the split-second of confusion in which the thing happened. Jacoby was leaning toward her, waiting.

"Yes," Sister Pamela whispered. "Yes, he *could* be the one, Lieutenant. . . ."

Jacoby whirled to Sister Jem. The older nun was shaking her head.

"No," she said. "No, he couldn't be. Why, he was a much taller

man, Sister, you remember. And much younger! He wasn't like this one at all."

Jacoby stood up and went to the sergeant at the podium. He spoke briefly in his ear, and the sergeant nodded. Then he said:

"Step in a little closer, Bresson, we want a real good look at you."

The young man stepped forward, still smiling.

"You ever go to church, Bresson?"

Not a flicker. "Who, me, Sarge? What are you trying to do, convert me?"

"You were hanging around Grand Central on Friday night, weren't you? Around seven-thirty?"

"Friday night?"

"Answer the question!"

"No," Bresson said. "Friday night I was with my girl. You don't believe me, ask her. I was at my girl's apartment, six o'clock to midnight."

"What's the name of your girl?"

"Her name's Bess Macken. She lives at 200 Rice Avenue. I never left her for a minute."

In the audience, Sister Jem touched Sister Pamela's hand. "You see?" she said. "He couldn't be the one, Sister, how could he? Let's not make things worse than they are!"

The young nun slumped in her chair, and looked toward Jacoby. The lieutenant wordlessly tried to give her the courage of her conviction, but she said:

"I guess she's right. He looks something like the man, but it's hard to be sure, it was all so confused. . ."

Jacoby frowned and motioned to the sergeant.

"Step down, Bresson," the sergeant ordered.

Sister Pamela went to see Reverend Mother Margaret on her last day. There had been neither criticism nor argument from the Superior at her announcement of her departure; her only appeal had concerned the stolen Donatello. She had begged that Sister Pamela's decision not be affected by the crime; there was no blame attached to her mistake; it had been a mistake of trustfulness.

"No, Mother," Sister Pamela said. "It's not just that. You see, that man was right about me, that Mr. Downey."

"Mr. Downey?" The Superior pursed her lips and tried to sound charitable. "Why should anything Mr. Downey said affect you, Sister?"

"Because he told the truth, Reverend Mother. Some people retreat to God, not advance toward Him. That's what I've done. I've hidden myself away from the world, and for the wrong reasons."

"And is that so bad?" The Superior smiled tenderly. "Sometimes we do the right things for the wrong reasons. Eventually, the reasons become right too. But if I thought for a moment that this incident in a railroad station—"

"I can never forgive myself for that, Reverend Mother."

"Forgiveness is the Lord's, Sister. It was merely an error of judgment—"

"Of ignorance! I don't know the world, and you see what that ignorance did?" She lowered her head. "I'd like to say goodbye to Sister Lydia, but I'm so ashamed."

The Superior came to take her arm. "Come," she said. "We'll see her together."

The old nun was asleep when they entered the infirmary. Clara, the lay sister who nursed the sick woman, drew them away from the bedside.

"She's been asking questions," Clara whispered. "I don't know what to say to her, Reverend Mother."

"Questions?"

"About the St. Francis," Clara said miserably, looking at Sister Pamela. "She wants to see it."

The young nun stared. "Then she knows? She knows about Mr. Downey's gift?"

"I'm sorry," the Reverend Mother said. "We thought to keep it from her, but one of the lay sisters must have told her. She thinks it's only lost or misplaced; she still thinks we'll find it."

"God grant we do," Clara said tearfully. "The old darling can't last, Reverend Mother, and it means so much to her. If she could see it before she's called. . ."

Sister Pamela turned aside, and the Superior took her arm. "Don't, Sister, don't blame yourself all over again—" but Sister Pamela shook free of the comforting hand, and fled from the infirmary.

A day later, she put aside the stiff, heavy garments of her service and dressed in the strange, flimsy clothing whose soft textures she had

almost forgotten. Then she rejoined the bewildering and untrustworthy world.

The invitation in the boardinghouse window was clear, yet the flinty eyed woman who had hand-lettered the sign looked at the applicant with disapproval.

"Did you say *Miss Pamela Wiley*?"

"Yes," she answered, trying not to wilt under the gaze. She saw it travel from cheap, flat-heeled shoes to the tight-banded hat which concealed her short hair.

"It was Father McKinney at St. Mary's who recommended your place," she said quickly. "I just need a small room; anything will do."

The priest's name was a balm that softened the craggy features. The landlady almost smiled.

"Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?"

The room was fourteen dollars a week, including two meals in the dismal diningroom on the first floor. The monthly total was almost the amount the church charity was contributing to Pamela's first weeks in the outside world. She had promised herself that she would end her dependence as soon as possible; she had attained certain skills in her noviceship and she would put them to work.

Even her simple cell at the convent had been more cheerful than the room the landlady gave her with its single window and its monotonous wallpaper of colorless roses. There was a full-length mirror on the closet door; she came across her reflection with a shock of surprise. It was the image of a pretty young woman, trim-figured even in the ill-fitting clothes. She still wore no makeup—it was an art she had yet to learn—but her unsullied complexion was fresh and smoothly lovely. And when her hair grew back. . .

She looked at herself without vanity. And for the first time since the theft of the suitcase, she began to cry.

At night, unable to sleep, she studied the pattern of light and broken-plaster on the ceiling over her bed and thought of her last days at the Holy Name. To leave the convent had been one thing; she had left out of a conviction, a belief about herself as sincere as her belief in God. But to have left at such a time, with one last deed that had deprived the convent of its greatest treasure and denied old Sister Lydia of her greatest happiness. . . .

She crushed the edge of the pillow in her fingers, trying not to think, but a new image kept recurring.

It was the man called Bresson.

That voice! Its timbre had made her scalp tingle the moment it came across the stage of the police lineup. It was the voice that had made the face seem familiar, made the twisted smile resemble that of the man who had betrayed her simple trust. But Sister Jem seemed so sure; her denial had made Pamela doubt the identification at once—and hadn't the man proved his innocence? There was something about a girl. . .

Pamela had spoken to Lieutenant Jacoby after the lineup. He had tried to make her do what her conscience refused to permit, to be final, conclusive.

"This alibi of his," Jacoby had said. "His witness is a girl friend, Sister—you know what that's worth."

"I can't be sure, Lieutenant," she had said miserably. "I wish I could be. I want the statue more than anything in the world, but I couldn't accuse a man who might be innocent. And Sister Jem—"

"Yes," Jacoby said, with a weary sigh. "But Sister Jem doesn't have your young eyes, Sister, remember that."

Now she was remembering, and all she could recall was the voice of the man named Bresson. Was it the same voice?

*"Can I help you, Sister?"*

*"Can I help you, Sister?"*

*"Can I help you, Sister?"*

She sat up abruptly in the bed, her face damp with perspiration.

It must be Bresson! It must be!

If she went back to Jacoby now, would it help? Could she retract her doubts, deny her own statements? It wasn't Bresson's crime she wanted punished; all she wanted was the Donatello, to see it delivered where it belonged.

She settled back against the pillow, and said a final prayer before going to sleep, for guidance, faith, and resolution.

The building was a gray monolith of triangular shape, forming a corner of the city block. The first floor was an unnerving complex of desks and offices and people who looked too busy to stop and question. It was an affable young man who helped her at last.

"A job?" he said. "Well, I guess you ought to see Mr. Meecham, he's in charge of personnel." He lifted an eyebrow, "What kind of work do you do? Secretarial?"

"Yes."

"We always seem to need typists; they're always getting married and having babies."

She let him guide her to the door of the personnel manager.

He was a phlegmatic man, bored by his work. He gave her a form to fill out and she took it to another desk. She had decided not to reveal her past, not to lie, only to omit. Where the questionnaire asked about previous employment, she wrote: NONE, and smiled in private enjoyment of the small joke. It was a rare smile for Pamela, and it served to make Mr. Meecham more obliging.

"We have an opening in the billing department that pays a little more," he said. "Ever learn how to use a statistical typewriter?"

"I'm afraid not; I can only do general typing."

"Well, Mrs. Ergman needs another girl. You're not married, I see. Engaged?"

"No."

"That's a relief." He returned her smile. "If it's okay with Mrs. Ergman, you could start work Monday—and I'm sure it'll be okay."

He reached into his desk drawer and withdrew a mimeographed booklet.

"This is the employee's manual; look it over between now and Monday."

"Thank you," Pamela murmured, and took the booklet from his hand.

She read it on the bus going crosstown. The cover title was: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES, GRAMERCY PRINTING COMPANY. There was an interoffice telephone directory in the rear of the book, and she studied the listings until she came to the one she was looking for.

BRESSON, JAMES K. . . . Shipping Dept., Ext. 406

There were eight girls in the typing pool, and its supervisor was a fidgety woman with an alcoholic breath and a habit of disappearing from the floor at hourly intervals. The work was plentiful and for three weeks there was no chance of accomplishing her purpose. She formed no friendships among her co-workers. Pamela was young but these girls

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were younger, and their frivolous interests seemed beyond her. After the first few days, they seemed to recognize her differences; they giggled behind her back and called her "the saint." One of them, in a moment of sympathy, taught her the sparing use of lipstick, and showed her, in a casual powder-room conversation, a simple hairstyle that would make her short auburn hair more attractive. She bought inexpensive but more flattering clothing and began to be noticeably pretty. The giggles became mixed with a little envy.

Then she saw him at last.

She was delivering a typed brochure to the lithographing department and passed the shipping room on the way back to her desk. He was loitering in the hallway, taking quick puffs on a cigarette. He stamped it out when he heard her heels clicking on the tile. She recognized him at once. He gave her the benefit of his lopsided smile.

"Hi," he said easily.

She reddened, and her heart thudded; she didn't fear recognition, but she was afraid.

He was looking her over appraisingly. He pulled another cigarette from the pack and asked if she had a light.

"I'm sorry," Pamela said. "I don't smoke."

"I haven't seen you around before, have I? You must be new."

"Yes." She hesitated. "I'm working for Mrs. Ergman."

"That old wino?" he laughed. "Listen, you want some free advice? Buy her a bottle sometime, she'll make things easy for you around here."

"I have to go—"

"And don't be an eager beaver. Nobody likes a hard worker, they make it tough on the rest of us." He stuck the unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth. "My name's Jimmy," he said. "What's yours?"

"Pamela Wiley."

He took her left hand and raised it toward his eyes; she winced at his touch.

"Don't get excited. I'm just looking for the evidence."

He studied her ringless fingers and let her go.

"Just checking," he said. "Everything checks out fine." He twisted the grin, making it half a leer. "Listen, you live in town? Not Queens or anything like that?"

"I live in the city. At a boarding house."



"Maybe we could take in a movie some night."

She brought her eyes to his face. It was a step she knew had to be taken—the heart of her amorphous plan—but she couldn't face the moment.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm busy tonight. I'm busy most nights."

His face hardened swiftly, his lips closing around the cigarette. "You got something against me? Or is it the shipping department?"

"It's not that—"

"The typing pool ain't exactly the executive floor. Or is that what you're hoping for?"

"Please, I didn't mean it that way. I'll be happy to go out with you sometime, but not right now."

The grin came back. "Okay," he said. "I'll give you a call, maybe next week. What's the extension?"

"208."

"Okay, 208," he chuckled. "I'll be seeing you around."

He telephoned her the following Monday, but the intervening days hadn't given her the strength to accept the invitation. He sounded angry when she refused.

That night she found a letter from Sister Jem.

"*Sister Lydia*," she wrote, "*has received Extreme Unction, but she has survived the crisis and is well enough to take some soup. However, Dr. Dunwoodie isn't very hopeful.*" . . .

The next time Jimmy Bresson called, Pamela was ready to say yes. He made the acceptance easier by the terms of the invitation.

"It's just a little party," he said. "A few friends of mine, some of 'em from the company. What do you say?"

"All right," Pamela answered.

"I won't be able to pick you up. The address is 200 Rice Avenue, Apartment 4-C. Come up around nine."

When she hung up, she wrote the address on a notepad and studied it. 200 Rice Avenue—an address she had heard before, at a different time and place. . .

She bought a new dress for the occasion. It was black, simply cut, high-throated. When she dressed that evening, she examined the effect in the mirror and thought the result unbecoming. She was wrong; the simplicity of the dress emphasized her slimness and the glow of her

white skin. Her hair was longer now, softly curling.

When she arrived at the apartment house on Rice Avenue, she searched the directory in the lobby until she found the apartment number. The name was MACKEN, B. It was the home of Jimmy Bresson's girl friend, the witness who provided him with his alibi, who lied to save him. Pamela felt a pang of bitterness just looking at the name.

Bess Macken answered the door. She was a full-breasted blonde with hard eyes darkly outlined. She was theatrical and older than Pamela thought she would be. Facing her, Pamela felt painfully innocent. Bess Macken returned an expression of resentment.

"You're Pamela, huh?" She put her hand on her hip and looked Pamela over disdainfully. Behind her, there was a burst of loud laughter and giggles. The heavy thrum of recorded music gave an air of nervous excitement to the gathering.

"Well, come in," Bess said. She took Pamela's coat and hung it in the hall closet. Then she looked at Pamela and shrugged, as if discounting her appeal, and led her inside.

Jimmy Bresson came to Pamela's side, whooping with exaggerated delight. "Well, what do you know?" he said, laughing. "If it isn't Miss Hard-to-get! Hey, look what I found!" He propelled her toward the others. "Meet Pamela," he said. "Pamela's the new girl—"

There was a confusing round of introductions, a blur of grinning faces. There were more men than women. Most were drinking beer. In the corner a couple danced, holding each other tightly and moving in a rhythm that had nothing to do with the music. Pamela looked away from them in embarrassment.

One of the girls from the typing pool was there; she looked indifferently at Pamela and whispered something to the man beside her. It seemed to increase his interest in Pamela and he came over and asked her to dance. She said no, she didn't know how, and that made the typist twitter. A man behind Pamela put his hand on her shoulder and began telling her a suggestive joke. She stopped him in the middle of it and worked her way through the crowd, trying to find her hostess.

Bess was in the kitchen, a tiny alcove off the living room. When she saw Pamela she said, "You want a drink, honey. You can have beer or whiskey."

"Nothing right now, thanks. I'd like to—freshen up."

"Right in there," Bess said.

The bathroom door was locked. Pamela turned away from it, feeling her cheeks burn. Across the room, Jimmy caught her eye and began moving toward her. She felt hot, stifled, unable to breathe. Why had she come here? What was she hoping to do here with these people?

Bresson was in front of her. He put both arms out, flattening his palms against the wall, imprisoning her in a small circle.

"So you finally broke down," he said. "About time, sister."

She laughed nervously.

"Now that's more like it," he said. "A lot more like it. We all need some laughs, don't we? Even a saint?" He grinned at her changed expression. "Yeah, I know what they call you at the office. Don't mind it, honey. Saints are okay with me. They got a way of turning into sinners."

"Please. I'm awfully warm. . ."

"Yeah, it's hotter than an oven here. Maybe we could go for a little walk."

"Jimmy." Bess was behind them, holding a tray of glasses, her exaggerated lips narrowed. "I thought you said you were going to help."

"What? Oh, yeah, sure." He took the tray from her and tapped Pamela's shoe with the side of his. "I'll be back in a couple of minutes, honey. Hang around."

He moved off, but Bess didn't. She stood watching Pamela's pale face, then, finding her drink on a table, she drained the glass, still watching her.

Pamela hardly knew how the party ended. The room seemed to empty all at once. The laughter died, the dancing couples disappeared—even the blaring music had become soft and muted. A man was asleep on the sofa, his shirt half-unbuttoned and his head on his chest. A girl in a vivid orange dress was tugging at his arm, trying to wake him. In the kitchen, Bess was systematically finishing the liquor in the only whiskey bottle that remained. Pamela didn't know where Jimmy was. She couldn't think. The noise, the confusion and smoke had invaded her brain until she almost felt drunk herself.

She stumbled toward the hall closet, feeling giddy and miserable. What had she gained? Nothing—nothing but a feeling that was empty and almost dirty. The front door opened and Jimmy stood looking at her. He wore a topcoat. His eyes were bleary and his crooked smile wan.

"Come on," he said thickly. "Couple of the guys are going over to the Moon Garden. It's a nice place, you'll like it."

"I'm sorry," Pamela said. "I have to be getting home."

"You can sleep all you want in the morning, it's Saturday. Hey, Ruthie, can't you get that bum awake?"

The girl in the orange dress swore, and Jimmy went to help her. He shook the drunk awake and got him into his jacket and topcoat. The girl in the orange dress, tittering, helped him out the door and down the stairs. Jimmy shut the door behind them, the last guests, and moved closer to Pamela. He caught her wrist, and pulled her towards him.

"You're a nice kid," he said. "You need some fun and games. And I know all the rules."

"Let me go," Pamela whispered.

Bess came out of the kitchen, swaying.

"You bum," she said. "You half-baked no-good bum!"

She swung her right arm at him, trying to strike his face with the back of her hand. Jimmy caught her wrist hard in mid-air and pulled it down to her side. She stumbled and almost fell.

"Let me go!" she howled. "Let me go!"

"You take it easy."

Bess screamed in rage and caught Bresson's hair in her left hand. He yelled and tried to push her away; she whimpered and held on. He slapped her on the jaw and she broke the grip. She staggered away from him, sobbing.

"Look!" he shouted, now at Pamela. "I don't have all night. You coming with me or aren't you?"

"I can't."

Bess was on the sofa, her face buried in the back cushion. He glared at her, and then at Pamela.

"All right," he said, breathing hard. "You two are a pair!"

He went out, slamming the front door savagely.

Bess's makeup was soiling the upholstery. Her shoulders were shaking, but when Pamela touched them solicitously she whirled and glowered at her.

"What do you want? What the hell are *you* hanging around for?"

"I'm sorry," Pamela said.

"Have you got a tissue?"

Pamela found one in her purse. Bess wiped her eyes and got up unsteadily and tottered toward the kitchen.

"That creep!" she said hoarsely, returning with a bottle and glass. "Oh, that zilch! You were smart not to go with him, he's nothing but trouble." She poured the last inch of whiskey out of the bottle into the glass.

"Don't," Pamela said. "Don't drink any more."

"Listen, I take enough orders!" Bess drank it in two gulps, coughed, and dropped onto the sofa again. "*Everybody* gives me orders," she moaned. She leaned back and closed her eyes. Pamela sat down beside her.

"Bess," she said. "Bess, may I talk to you?"

"What?"

"Are you alone? Do you have a family?"

"My mother's dead. . ."

"And your father?"

"That guy? He's the president of the creep society."

"I want to help you, Bess. Do you believe me?"

The woman snorted, and turned a loose grin in her direction. "Sure. Sure I do. You're the saint, ain't that right?"

Gingerly, Pamela touched Bess's limp hand. The grin faded and Bess looked almost fearful, but she didn't shake her off.

Pamela said quickly, "Tell me about Jimmy. Tell me why you put up with a man like that."

"That zilch," Bess said weepily. She fumbled for the handkerchief and blew her nose. "That's the only kind I get. All the drunks and crooks. . . he's a crook, you know that? Yeah, a two-bit crook."

"You don't mean that—"

"I don't, huh? He's a dirty thief, he'll steal you blind. Look. Look at this!" She grabbed the jeweled pin on her bosom. "Where do you think this came from? You think Jimmy'd spend his own dough on me? It came from some old lady's suitcase."

"Why would he do that? He has a job—"

"Not enough for him. Nothing's ever enough. He told me he was going straight, he got scared after they hauled him in last time. You think I believe him? He's probably down at some terminal right now. . ."

"But why should he steal suitcases? What does he do with the things he steals?"

"Gives 'em away, sells 'em. What do you think?"

"Where, Bess? Who buys such things?"

Bess looked into Pamela's wide eyes and chuckled.

"You're a one, all right. Little Miss Innocent. You never hear of a fence, kid? Jimmy spends more time over at Wormer's place than he does at work."

"Wormer's?"

"The pawnshop." Bess put her cheek against the sofa again, her mouth dropping open. "Why don't you leave me alone, huh? I'm tired." She put her hand on her midsection and groaned. "I'm going to be sick."

Pamela leaned closer. The woman's breath was ragged, her eyes shut. Pamela spoke her name again, but Bess was silent. Then she began to snore.

Pamela stood up. She looked down at the sleeping woman, then went into the bedroom and came out with a pillow. She swung Bess's legs to the sofa, then placed the cushion under her head.

"God bless you, Bess Macken," she said softly.

Then she went to the closet, and left the apartment.

She returned to the boardinghouse with a sense of joy. Was it going to be this easy? Was the trail going to end the next morning, in the cluttered confines of a neighborhood pawnbroker? She hadn't known where her search would lead, or what she would have to do before the Donatello was recovered. Now, suddenly, the answer seemed possibly simple.

She thought she would be unable to sleep, but sleep came quickly. She woke to a gray morning and a strange feeling of voided emotion. What had made her so optimistic the night before? She dressed apprehensively, afraid to face a final disappointment.

She found Wormer's listed in the telephone directory. It was raining by the time she reached the pawnshop. She stood looking at the window display, probing the miscellaneous clutter on the chance that the statue of St. Francis might be openly displayed, but there were only cameras, battered musical instruments, microscopes, razors—a grab-bag of articles far removed from the one she sought.

She went inside.

At first, there seemed to be no one in attendance. Then a man came out of the back room, a shuffling, barrel-chested man with an unkempt ring of hair around his bald head. He wore a stained vest, but no tie; his manner wasn't cordial.

"Pawn or buy?" he said.

"What?"

"You want to hock or buy something, Miss?"

"Buy," Pamela said shyly. "But I don't know if you have what I want." She looked around the room, at the guitars hanging in bunches like strung fruit, at the glass cases so dusty they obscured their contents. She was conscious of the pawnbroker's narrow gaze; she tried to be casual.

"I'm looking for something—ornamental," she said. "A statue, perhaps." She turned to meet his eyes. They were oddly hostile. "Do you have any religious objects?"

"I got rosaries," he grunted. "Jewelry. Some pictures. You tell me what you want, I'll look for it."

"A statue," Pamela said tautly. "That's what I'd really like. Do you have any religious statues?"

He shuffled down the counter, the soles of his slippers scraping against the floor.

"I'll go check in the back. You wait here."

He pushed aside the dingy curtain that concealed the back room. She intensified her hunt when he was gone, but found nothing. She came to the front counter and saw the thick ledgers on the stool behind it; they must contain records of his transactions. If she could examine them. . .

He came out from the curtain, a hint of a smile on his fleshy face. "Yeah, I think maybe I could help you. It might take a little while, Miss. You don't mind waiting?"

"No, I don't mind. Couldn't—" she hesitated, not wanting to seem eager. "Couldn't you check your ledgers? Wouldn't they tell you?"

He came closer to her, leaning over the counter. "The ledgers is my personal business—what the hell you care about my ledgers?"

"I'm sorry. I just thought—"

He gave her a suspicious scowl, and lifted the books from the stool. He went to the back with them.

"I'll be back," he said. "I think I ought to have a real nice statue someplace, if I can find it. Got a real nice St. Francis in the other day—"

She caught her breath. "St. Francis?"

"Yeah. The one with the birds." He looked at her once more before disappearing behind the curtain. --

There was no place to sit down, and she was feeling faint. She leaned against an uncluttered portion of the wall and closed her eyes, her lips moving in prayer.

The pawnbroker emerged, the St. Francis in his hand. It was a thick, hairy hand, and it held the glory of the work without respect for its meaning or its loveliness. He turned it upside down and looked at the dirty white sticker on the base.

"Here it is," he said. "It's a real fine piece. It ain't cheap, Miss."

"How much?"

He put the statue on the counter, turned it around and rubbed his bristly jaw.

"Twenty dollars," he said, darting a quick, cunning look at her.

She came to him slowly, clutching her purse. She could barely answer.

"It's—it's a little more than I meant to pay—"

"Look, lady, it cost me almost that much."

"But it's just what I want," she said. She reached out and touched the smooth surface. "Yes," she said dreamily. "It's exactly what I've been looking for."

She put her purse down and opened it with nervous fingers.

The hairy hand closed over hers, and took the purse from the counter. She looked up, startled.

"I'll do it for you," the pawnbroker said. He was breathing heavily. He turned the purse over, spreading its jaws with both hands, and dumped the contents on the glass-topped counter—bills, coins, her rosary, a shower of small things struck the glass.

"What are you doing?" Pamela cried.

"I'm helping you," the man sneered. He rummaged through the scattered objects. He picked up her cashier's card and read it with squinting eyes. He lifted the empty purse and put his hand inside, scouring, searching the lining.



"Please!" Pamela said, her voice shaking. "Why are you doing this? I just wanted to buy the statue—"

"Sure you did," he grunted. He began stuffing the contents back into the bag. "And all I wanted was to check, see? In my business, we like to know who we're dealing with. Understand?"

He looked up as the bell jangled and the front door opened.

"It's about time," he said. "I've been stalling for half an hour."

"I came as quick as I could," Jimmy Bresson said. He came to the counter in three strides and took the purse from the pawnbroker's hand, not even looking at Pamela.

"Nothing. No gun, no identification. You sure she's a cop?" the pawnbroker said.

Bresson turned slowly to face her. She was too shocked to be afraid. She moved her lips without speaking.

"I don't know," he said. "But she's been acting like a cop. That's why I told you to call me if she showed up." He curled his fingers about Pamela's left arm and held it tightly. "What about it, honey? You want to do a little talking?"

"Please," she mumbled. "I just came to buy something, Jimmy. This statue. . ."

Bresson glanced at the serene bronze figure on the counter.

"You were pumping Bess," he said. "She told me all about it when I came back last night. You never figured on that, did you?"

"I'm not with the police. I swear I'm not!"

"Then why all the questions?" He tightened his grip until she cried out. "Huh? Why all the nosing around?"

Wormer said, "Look, I don't want any trouble in here. If this dame ain't a cop—"

"She's something! She's got to be. Bess told her all about me, about where I've been dumping the stuff. And now she shows up here the next morning. Don't that sound fishy to you?"

"It was the statue!" Pamela gasped. "That's all I wanted!"

"The statue?"

Bresson looked at the St. Francis again. He picked it up, and regarded the contemplative figure in blank wonder; then he narrowed his eyes at the girl.

"The nun," he said softly.

Wormer made a hawking noise. "What the hell is this?"

"The nun!" Bresson said. "It was in her suitcase. That's what this one's after. Only how did she know?"

Pamela shut her eyes. "I *was* the nun," she said. "I was the one you robbed."

Bresson's jaw dropped.

"I left the convent over a month ago. I had to find the statue again. It was a gift from someone. It meant so much to them, to me. . ."

Wormer swore under his breath, and crossed himself at the same time. "Bad luck," he said. "Bad luck robbing a nun, Jimmy, I told you that!"

"Shut up!"

Jimmy released her arm and walked around her, incredulous. "You're the one? You!"

"I didn't come here to get you into trouble. I don't want anything but the statue, Jimmy, I swear that!"

"You went to a lot of trouble, didn't you? You took that job just to get next to me, didn't you?"

"Yes!"

Bresson turned to the pawnbroker. "Can you tie that?" he said. "Can you figure a thing like that?" He shook the statue like a club, and rubbed spittle from his lips with his free hand. "It must be quite a statue, huh?"

"It's valuable—but only to the Church, only for its meaning, Jimmy. It wouldn't do you any good. . ."

Wormer groaned. "A mess, a mess! I don't like this kind of business, Jimmy, why couldn't you be more careful?"

Bresson went back to the counter and put the statue down carefully.

"It's valuable," he said.

"Only spiritual!" Pamela cried. "It's only bronze. It belongs to the convent. I wanted to see it back where it belongs. Please let me have it; I promise not to involve you."

Wormer said uncomfortably, "Look, we can trust a nun, Jimmy, let's let her go. Let's get that thing out of here."

Bresson laughed. "You jerk. You believe that junk about spiritual value? This damn thing is *old*. I should have seen it before. It's maybe hundreds of years old!"

"So what? So what good is it?"

"It might be worth a fortune!"

Pamela covered her face with her hands. Now Wormer himself was interested. He looked at the St. Francis with greed widening his eyes.

"You could be right. Some of this religious stuff runs into the thousands. I heard of such things. . ."

"We could make a deal with a collector maybe. We could handle it through Mike the Broker. He's the guy who'll know what it's worth."

"You want to bring Mike in on this?"

"Why not?" Bresson snarled. "You think you could handle it yourself, you and your nickel-and-dime business? This stuff's his specialty; he could give us a price. If we don't like it we don't have to sell."

"What about the girl?"

Bresson squinted at her, and rubbed his cheek.

"That depends," he said softly. "If it's what I think it is. . ."

"Listen to me," she said tearfully. "You don't have to sell it. I'll pay you whatever you ask; I'll get the money somehow. You just have to trust me."

"How much, honey? You think you could scrape up a few grand?"

"If you'll give me time!"

Bresson grinned at the pawnbroker. "You see what I mean? It *must* be worth plenty. Take the Sister in the back room, Wormer, and then we'll call Mike. We'll tell him to come to us."

"He won't do it."

"He'll come," Bresson said cockily, "when he hears what we got for him." He stopped to peer into the tiny sculptured face of St. Francis. "I got a feeling about this one," he said crooningly. "A real good feeling, Wormer. . ."

*This is how the world ends*, Pamela thought. She sat in the small stuffy room that smelled of fried grease and perspiration, her body limp in the stiff-backed chair near the cold radiator.

On the other side of the room, cross-legged in a rocker, Bresson sat and waited patiently for the broker's arrival, only vaguely intent on the day-old tabloid he was reading. He would look up and smile thinly at her now and then, and each time the front doorbell jangled he would stand tensely until Wormer took care of his patrons.

The pawnbroker came into the room, mopping at his wet, lined forehead.

"He's not coming," he said. "It's almost two hours, Jimmy. I told

you he wouldn't come down here—"

"He said he would. Relax."

"It's *her* I'm thinking about. What if she's missed?"

"Nobody'll miss her."

"And then what? After we make the deal, what? That's the part I want to know."

"If it's a good-enough deal, it'll be worth anything."

Pamela heard the words, but they meant nothing. She was empty of feeling or reaction; if they meant to kill her, she knew she would be unable even to cry out in protest.

When another twenty minutes passed, the telephone rang. Wormer took the call, listened intently, and then covered the mouthpiece.

"He's here," he said. "He's calling from someplace in the neighborhood."

"Double-checking," Bresson grinned. "He's a wise old fox, that Mike. Tell him everything's okay, he can come over. He won't be sorry."

Wormer leaned over the telephone.

Five minutes later, the front doorbell jangled.

Wormer went to answer it, and returned with a tall, white-haired man in a bulky alpaca. He came into the room ahead of the pawnbroker, his rubber-tipped cane thumping lightly on the floor. He appraised his surroundings swiftly and with quick contempt; then his hawk's eyes came to rest on the girl. They flickered momentarily. Pamela returned the gaze and opened her mouth in the beginning of an exclamation, but his eyes were speaking now, telling her something, bidding her to silence.

"Well?" Mike grunted. "It's a pretty little picture. Only I came forty miles for this, so make it fast and good. Who's the girl?"

"She's a nun," Bresson said. "A nun, Mike, no kidding!" He spoke nervously, deferentially.

"Don't give me that. Since when do nuns wear lipstick? And my name isn't Mike. It's Mr. Downey to you, Bresson."

"She left the convent, and she's been after me for this statue. Mr. Downey, you wouldn't believe what she did! That's how I knew it was valuable!"

"What statue?"

Bresson snapped his fingers at Wormer. The pawnbroker lifted the

St. Francis tenderly and brought it over.

"We thought it might be worth plenty, Mr. Downey," he said. "We figured you were the one who'd know. If you think it's worth something, we could make a deal. . ."

"Only we want good terms," Bresson said. "We want a straight cut, Mr. Downey, fifty-fifty—"

"Not so fast."

The broker examined the statue, then he took his eyes from the sculpture to look at the girl.

"And what about her? Is she in on the deal?"

Bresson laughed. "She was kind of like the middleman, Mr. Downey, only there's no cut for her."

"And what happens to her later?"

"We'll take care of it, Mr. Downey, you can trust us."

"I'll bet I can."

The big man unbuttoned his coat and reached into an inner pocket for a pair of spectacles. He put them on and studied the bronze more intently. Bresson and the pawnbroker watched him tensely.

Downey turned it to every angle. He scratched his thumbnail over its patina and brought it directly under the naked lightbulb dangling from the middle of the ceiling.

Then he hefted it and turned to Wormer.

"You had this thing on sale?"

"Sure, Mr. Downey, only that was before I knew—"

"How much?"

"What?"

"What were you pricing it at?"

Bresson chuckled. "Look, we didn't know any better, we thought it was just a hunk of metal—"

"I was gonna sell it for twenty bucks," Wormer laughed. "Can you imagine, a thing like that?"

Downey walked deliberately to Wormer's side and shoved the statue against his barrel chest. Wormer grunted, and blinked stupidly.

"You're a crook, Wormer," Downey said. "The cheapest crook there is. That piece of junk isn't worth a nickel. Melt it down for scrap, maybe it's worth two bucks. Next time you want to handle junk, call a junk dealer." He poked his finger in in Wormer's ribs. "Only don't call Mike. You understand?"

He turned on his heel and headed for the doorway. Bresson leaped in front of him, grabbing his arm.

"You're out of your head! It's gotta be worth something! This dame went to so much trouble—"

"Look, Bresson," Downey said angrily, "you don't have to teach me my business. I say it's a piece of trash. If it was worth something, I'd handle it—that's my livelihood. But it's a cheap copy of something that wasn't any good in the first place. There are a million of them floating around the country, you couldn't sell it to a five-and-dime if you polished it up for a year. Now get out of my way!"

Bresson shook his head in disbelief.

"But the nun—"

Downey chuckled. "That's what you get for being so stupid, Bresson. Don't you know nuns aren't people? They're not smart. They don't understand about money. They'll kill themselves over a scrap of junk just because it was blessed. You'd be amazed all the dumb things nuns do, and they don't get a nickel for it. They're the biggest suckers in the world!" He turned to look at Pamela. "And if you'll take my advice, you'll let this one out of here. She's liable to say a prayer and send you all to hell. Not that you don't deserve it." He laughed and stepped past Bresson to the door.

When the bell jangled again out front, Wormer groaned.

"Now what?" he said. "What do we do now, Bresson?"

Bresson chewed his lip, and went to Pamela.

"Listen!" he said savagely. "You listen to me!"

"I'm listening, Jimmy."

"We're letting you go. But I swear I'll kill you if you turn me in—" He paused, and smiled thinly. "No. I'll kill that stupid Bess, that's what I'll do. You wouldn't like to have that happen, would you, Sister?"

"You don't have to worry. I said I wouldn't give you away. All I ever wanted was the statue."

He scowled. Then he went to the pawnbroker and grabbed the statue rudely from his hands.

"Here," he said, shoving it at her. "Now you got what you wanted. Get the hell out of here and leave me alone."

She took the image and pressed it to her breast.

"I'll pray for you, Jimmy," she said.

She went to the doorway and parted the curtain. Wormer came up behind her.

"Sister—" he said.

"Yes?"

He grinned foolishly. "For me, too, sometime, huh? A prayer for me."

"Yes," Pamela said. "For you, too."

She came out into the rain-swept street. There was a long black automobile at the curb. Its driver tapped the horn lightly for her attention. The back door opened, and Downey called to her.

"Come on, Sister," he said. "I'll drive you home."

She smiled, and then, seeing the raindrops on the Donatello, she placed the statue of St. Francis underneath her coat and ran to the car. She climbed into the seat beside him, and Downey leaned toward the driver.

"The Holy Name," he said.

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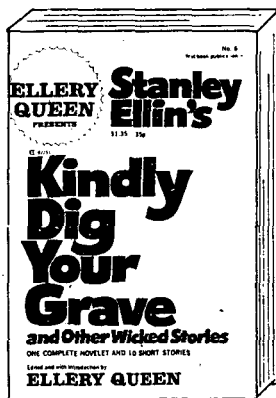
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